THE
SLAVE OF IDEAS
&
OTHER PLAYS

BY

A S PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M A, I.C S,
Bar-at-law,
(*Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of The United Kingdom*)



THIRD EDITION

PUBLISHERS

V, RAMASWAMI SASTRULU & SONS
292, Subhash Chandra Bose Road,
Post Box 1372
MADRAS, 1

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PRINTED BY
V VENKATESWARA SASTRULU
of V RAMASWAMY SASTRULU & SONS
AT THE 'VAVILLA' PRESS
MADRAS

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PREFACE

TO "SLAVE OF IDEAS" AND "SITA'S" CHOICE.

In these two plays, I have tried to portray modern Indian life in this time of transition, when the old ideas are being gradually displaced by new To the social historian of India, nothing will appear to be more striking than the performance of widow re-marriages in castes accustomed for centuries to enforced widowhood, and the new-found freedom for women (despite Manu's famous declaration, 'No woman has a right to be free', *nastri svatantryam arhati*) and the tolerance of meat-eating and drinking in castes sworn to a strict and uncompromising vegetarianism and a fanatical teetotalism for countless generations But, now and then, atavistic tendencies prevail, and the call of the race meets with a sudden and unquestioning response, with tragic consequences

Civilisation is the artifical modification of the primitive qualities inherent in man. The thin veneer it puts on man, however, has often, like tincture of iodine, powerful and subtle inner ractions. So, though there is no reason to believe that enforced widowhood, strict vegetarianism and total abstinence from drink were known to primitive man, these institutions of an advanced civilisation have left an impress on the blood of the high-caste Hindus, and cannot be got rid of without a terrible struggle.

By appealing to the feelings of chivalry, fairplay and justice, enforced widowhood may finally disappear from Hindu society, though the reluctance to marry widows may continue

for centuries more But, vegetarianism and teetotalism will not be so easily uprooted, as their opponents cannot advance any moral grounds against them and have to rely only on arguments of pleasure or expediency or on medical arguments of doubtful value.

So too, while a single standard of morality, for both men and women, is certainly the only one imaginable in pure ethics, it will have to fight hard before it will be really accepted, apart from lip homage. Most men and women all over the world allow a greater laxity for man than for woman as they feel that the Mother of the Race, the Fountain of Love, she who carries the babe in the womb, should have a higher standard of purity than the father

When institutions have become universally established and accepted, individuals have only to conform to them, without any effort at independent thinking. But, when established institutions are being shaken to their very foundations by new thought, every individual has to think out for himself his course of action and has to go through a severe struggle Then it is that father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother take different sides, as in the American Civil War For the time being, these differences appear to be a misfortune, but they are essential for the onward march of humanity, being the beatings on the drum of society for creating the harmony of life

"Gita," Kilpauk,
Madras.

A. S P AYYAR.

THE SLAVE OF IDEAS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1. RANGARAJU, A BARRISTER.
2. SUBHADRA, HIS WIFE.
3. NAGAMMA, HIS MOTHER
4. MANGAMMA, HIS DAUGHTER.
5. SURAYYA, HIS SON.
6. ANANDASWAMI, A SANNYASI.
7. BRAHMANANDAYOGI, ANOTHER SANNYASI.
8. THIMMARAJU, RANGARAJU'S COUSIN.
9. PICHAYYA, A JAIL OFFICIAL.

THE
SLAVE OF IDEAS

ACT I

The verandah of a spacious bungalow standing in its own grounds in Madras In front of it is a garden with neglected crotons, fading ferns, and decadent roses. Rangaraju, a barrister aged thirty, is sitting on a comfortable chair in front of a table, dressed in a dhoti and silk shirt, and reading the book 'Rajayoga' by Vivekananda His wife, Subhadra, a pretty woman of twenty-five, with an oval face, sparkling eyes and full lips, a clear skin, and an attractive figure, comes out of the house dressed in a beautiful Karachi silk saree and with a tennis racket in hand She lays the racket on the table, and sits on a chair by the side of Rangaraju. Time 4 p m

Subhadra—Hullo, here you are at it again! It is not quite five minutes since we had tea What a heavy reading after such a light tea! Thimmaraju was saying yesterday at the Club that, after your talk with Anandaswami last week, you have been won over to the old superstitions, and that your agnosticism, which began to be shaken a year ago by your reading the writings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, has almost disappeared.

Rangaraju—It doesn't require any profound intelligence to have guessed that, though it certainly does credit to Thimmaraju's brain Thimmaraju is a talkative, empty-headed, bragging, military man.

Subhadra—Oh, he is not so bad. Of course, he is not very intelligent. But, he is a soldier all right He is an expert horseman and was twice mentioned in the despatches He has also quite a good stock of funny stories of his war experiences

Rangaraju—His stock keeps on gathering volume, as the days go by. He served only in Mesopotamia, but will retail stories about his service in Gallipoli, and the western front, if his audience has not known him before.

Subhadra—You are too hard on him But then, you have never liked him really since your childhood. Mother says that when you two were children you were always fighting and that Thimmaraju was invariably beating you.

Rangaraju—He was reserving all his energies for fighting, the brute! He was always top from the bottom in our class And, what is he now? He is only one degree removed from a bull, so simple in his intellect, and taking such a delight in coarse pleasures. His wife, your cousin, Kamamma, is quite different She is gentle and refined, and has greater ambitions than to eat and drink well.

Subhadra—But, can she eat and drink well? Her state of health will not permit it.

Rangaraju—Do you suggest that she is making a virtue of necessity?

Subhadra—Many so-called abstinent people may have really no capacity for enjoyment.

Rangaraju—But, I don't think that anybody will admire Thimmaraju's capacity for eating and drinking.

Subhadra—Childhood dislikes die hard After all, he follows our ancestral vocation, the soldier's job, and has not got the subtlety of you lawyers But, is that really a defect?

Rangaraju—Subtlety is only the concomitant of intelligence, and will be absent when the latter is absent.

Subhadra—I dare say our ancestors were more like him than like you

Rangaraju—I don t know I could have fought at least as well as Thimmaraju if only I had chosen his vocation. Modern warfare does not depend on muscles But I considered a barrister's job to be more congenial to my temperament than cutting people's throats.

Subhadra—Thimmaraju says that one is violent murder, and the other non-violent murder.

Rangaraju—How does a lawyer commit non-violent murder?

Subhadra—By starvation, by depriving some persons of all their means of subsistence by ruinous litigation

Rangaraju—I wonder how anybody can go on listening to Thimmaraju's inane stories and absurd theories.

Subhadra—Kamamma tells me that she is never tired of hearing them.

Rangaraju—What else will a wife say? Still, I like Kamamma for that Such whole-hearted admiration by a wife is not a bad thing to have

Subhadra—You like it?

Rangaraju—I can't say I don t Of course, I shall go on deluding myself that the admiration is merited before I really enjoy it

Subhadra—Something like persuading yourself that a murderer you get acquitted really deserved to be let off?

Rangaraju—Yes, if you like to put it like that

Subhadra—Thimmaraju says that a man becomes a first-class criminal lawyer only after getting at least one or two real murderers acquitted

Rangaraju—What is funny in it any more than in a man's becoming a great general only after the slaughter of a few thousand innocent men?

Subhadra (laughs)—You are right. Every profession has got its ludicrous side. Why, the other day, Thimmaraju quoted in the Club some droll lines, from Poplar

"The law the lawyers know about
Is property and land,
But why the leaves are on the trees,
And why the winds disturb the seas,

Why honey is the food to bees,
Why horses have such tender knees,

Why winters come and rivers freeze,
Why Faith is more than what one sees,

And Hope survives the worst disease,
And Charity is more than these,
They do not understand,"

and we laughed and laughed till tears rolled down our cheeks

Rangaraju—Damn the scoundrel!

Subhadra—Why get so excited about it? It is only in jest he said it

Rangaraju—A bitter jest is the poison of friendship, and false friends are worse than open enemies Remember also that empty vessels make the greatest noise That man has no idea of the seriousness of life and its problems

Subhadra—You yourself said the other day to me,

"The world is full of froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own!"

Rangaraju—This Thin maraju is all froth and bubble!

Subhadra—May be But, don't you be like stone! Now, let us leave the fellow and talk about our own matters Tomorrow evening is the whist drive at the Club Aren't you coming?

Rangaraju—No. I shall be at Avadi then to see Brahmanandayogi

Subhadra—What do you want to do with him? Are not the discussions with Anandaswami the other day, and your daily communications with him since, enough? Thimmaraju will be highly amused to learn about this new idea

Rangaraju—Don't you go about telling him all my affairs.

Subhadra—But, what harm is there in telling him about this?

Rangaraju—He is a fellow I shouldn't care to know about my affairs

Subhadra—What are you going to see Brahmanandayogi for?

Rangaraju.—To have a talk on the fundamental problems of life. You know the famous lines in *Omar Khayyam*

"Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we scatter it to bits-and then
Remould it nearer to our heart's desire!"

We want to discuss the sorry scheme of things in this world thread-bare in order to remould it nearer to our heart's desire.

Subhadra—I am afraid it will all be in vain. As Omar Khayyam himself says

"We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow-shapes that come and go

Round with the sun-illumined lantern held
In midnight by the Master of the Show

But helpless pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this chequer-board of nights and days,
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays

The moving finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Rangaraju—No, Subhadra, no Come with me and listen to Brahmanandayogi He will talk of God's grace before which every difficulty disappears and hope comes again to the human heart like sunrise after darkness

Subhadra—They say that he is a man of silence and that he rarely discusses things

Rangaraju—Who told you so?

Subhadra—Thimmaraju.

Rangaraju—Again Thimmaraju! Can't you find any other body to talk to at the Club?

Subhadra—Why, what is wrong with talking to cousin Thimmaraju?

Rangaraju—Oh, nothing, except that he gets on my nerves by his inane talk and tall stories Well, when did he meet Brahmanandayogi?

Subhadra—He never met him at all He simply heard the gossip about him. He said to me that Brahmanandayogi was the *guru* of that gas-bag, Anandaswami, and that he was a particularly silent man So, how will you manage to talk to the *yogi* at all ?

Rangaraju—Anandaswami will be there, and will persuade the *yogi* to answer my questions, if necessary, though he says that all my doubts will be dispelled by merely sitting in the presence of the *yogi*

Subhadra.—A good boast that, like that man's telling me the other day that though he does not know a word of Sanskrit he will understand it when he hears it ! When will you be going to Avadi and when will you return ?

Rangaraju—I shall start at 4 p m and return only at about 10 p m.

Subdahra—So, you will miss the whole of the whist drive ?

Rangaraju—Yes

Subhadra—One by one, all your old habits are going. It is weeks since you touched meat or wine or cards Who will believe that hardly twelve months ago you were eating meat twice a day, stocking a variety of choice wines, and playing bridge and poker well on to midnight ? All that is gone Now, there is only this eternal pre-occupation with sky-pilots and their problems !

Rangaraju—I am glad of the change. I feel now that I am bursting with spiritual energy.

Subhadra—Well, don't let there be a burst-up!

Rangaraju—You don't feel any interest in these things, Subhadra?

Subhadra—No, honestly I don't I get bored at these discussions as to whence we came and whither we go. I consider it criminal to devote our precious time to thinking about the next world when there is not enough time to devote to the affairs of this world, or to speculate on the existence of God instead of devoting that energy to better our own existence

Rangaraju—Don't you believe in the existence of God?

Subhadra—Yes, but I don't want to discuss about his qualities, as I am convinced that we shall never know them, however much we discuss, and that the discussions only lead to acute differences or strange superstitions or to fanatical practices destructive of a joyous existence. A God-intoxicated man behaves just like other intoxicated men, wasting his time, money and energy on vain discussions, useless quarrels and fond imaginings, all of which may end, in extreme cases, in spiritual madness akin to *delirium tremens* Well, now, I must be going for tennis. Why don't you also come and have a set, after so many days?

Rangaraju—Sorry. I want to finish this book now.

Subhadra—My word! You have got properly caught.

Rangaraju—As I am going to see a man said to be a great *yogi*, I thought I would do well to read something

about *yoga* in advance, and this book was suggested by Anandaswami

Hear what it says

"The stream that flows has legs all over,
The fire that burns has tongues all over,
The wind that blows has hands all over,
And we who pray have faith all over!"

Subhadra—I do hope these men who pray will have the milk of human kindness to some extent at least instead of having the whole of it dried up by heated prayers You know what they say

"So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind,
While just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs"

Now it is time for me to push off. The car is ready. Bye-bye! *(goes away)*

Rangaraju—(to himself) She is a typical daughter of her father, never cares a rap for philosophy or religion, is full of the joy of life, and doesn't want to be bothered by speculations regarding the unknown. But she never utters a lie, and has the courage to speak the truth. That is a very rare virtue. I wish she were a little more interested in serious questions and a little less in Thimmaraju and his silly twaddle. But, I myself was like her a year ago, and she may become like me a year hence. Well, let me finish this book *(goes into his room on the verandah and reads.)*.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

A day after —The compound of a choultry in Avadi, Anandaswami and Rangaraju engaged in conversation. Time 5 p. m

Rangaraju—So, you don't advise my putting to him my doubts at once?

Anandaswami—No. He gives his answers unasked. He knows each one's worries by applying the searchlight of his knowledge, and sends out, from the depth of his soul, a stream of soothing calmness straight into the troubled minds, and they settle down to stillness and peace, like pricked bubbles.

Rangaraju—How is it possible?

Anandaswami—Sit quiet for half an hour in his presence, and see for yourself. The silence of a desert, the stillness of the night, a dead friend by our side, a sleeping child, do these not affect us visibly? How much more so the trained silence of a spiritual giant like Brahmanandayogi? Now, let us go in

Rangaraju—How am I to introduce myself?

Anandaswami (Smiles)—You need not bother about it. He never worries about anybody coming in or going out.

Rangaraju—A strange man! What happens when Rajas and men of rank come to see him?

Anandaswami—All are the same to him High and low, nobles and commoners, caste and outcaste, men and women, all are one to him, and have to sit round like the rest

Rangaraju—He must be a remarkable man. But, still, many of his visitors must have been offended For, it is a failing in many human beings to desire to be treated with the consideration to which they have been accustomed.

Anandaswami—The feelings of resentment evaporate when they realise that this *yogi* is entirely unconcerned about their opinions of him. Come, let us go in

(They both enter the hall of the choultry. At one end of it is sitting Brahmanandayogi, a sannyasi aged 50, with a face of Buddha-like serenity and repose. He is in a samadhi [1] *A dozen people are sitting around him in perfect silence Nobody seems to notice the two new entrants who quietly take their seats among the rest. Rangaraju is profoundly affected by the mere sight of the yogi in samadhi).*

Rangaraju to Anandaswami—His eyes are gazing fixedly, apparently at the tip of his nose but really into some infinity which cannot be seen in our conscious moments. A mystic smile is playing about his lips, a smile of supreme knowledge, confidence, and pity. He does not nod or smile as a sign of welcome to me. But, I feel that there is an unspoken welcome for me.

Anandaswami—Please sit quietly and see what happens.

1. A state of spiritual trance

(Rangaraju sits silently for fifteen minutes. His face drops the eager look of a controversialist who is anxious to put questions, and takes on that of one who has come, like the rest, only to sit still and take in some of the peace of that atmosphere)

Rangaraju (to himself)

The doubts which assailed me before have disappeared like dew-drops before the rising sun. I must tell this to Anandaswami (*Aloud to Anandaswami*). My doubts are all gone. What hidden power is this! (*Anandaswami does not reply. Nor does any other body there show any signs of having heard Rangaraju's words*)

Rangaraju (to himself)—Let me stop this babbling! Every nerve in me is tingling as if tuned to some mysterious infinite (*He rises, as if overpowered, and prostrates before Brahmanandayogi who is waking up from his Samadhi It appears to him as if Brahmanandayogi has become bigger and bigger and filled the whole hall He finds the right hand of the yogi slowly lifted up in an attitude of blessing over his head, and feels as if there is an actual sprinkling of holy water on his head. He is in an ecstasy of joy and peace He rises up and goes out of the hall into the compound after beckoning to Anandaswami who follows him*)

Rangaraju—He radiates peace and dispels doubts as the sun radiates light and dispels darkness I am grateful to you for bringing me here Bless me as your disciple. (*Prostrates to him*)

Anandaswami (raises him up) My blessings, my son. May prosperity and happiness always attend you!

Rangaraju—Now, I pray you to name my *Ishtadevata*[1] and to give the *upadesam*[2] for my welfare.

Anandaswami (Takes out a small framed picture of Lord Sri Krishna and gives it) This is your *Ishtadevata* Your *upadesam* is, 'If any person who has wronged you confesses his guilt, and begs your pardon, and promises to reform, it is your duty to forgive him, and to treat him exactly as if he never wronged you in thought, word or deed.'

Rangaraju—I shall strictly follow your *Upadesam*. I presume it applies to all wrongs without exception, and however grave.

Anandaswami—It does. It extends even to a person seeking to murder you. There is no exception whatever.

Rangaraju—I shall obey you implicitly. Now, I must go and re-arrange my life afresh. What are the things you recommend as first steps to my spiritual regeneration?

Anandaswami—I would advise a rigid abstinence from all kinds of non-vegetarian food and alcoholic drink, and doing *Pooja*[3], reading the Bhagavad Gita for half an hour per day before Lord Krishna's picture After six months of this, when you feel that you have fairly conquered your anger, lust and greed, you may go on a pilgrimage tour round the holy places like Banares, Rameswaram, Jagannath, Dwaraka, Prayag and

1. The favourite form in which the deity is to be worshipped
2. The religious injunction
3. Worship

Brindaban. I shall see you again in a year in Madras after my great tour is finished.

Rangaraju—You don't want me to compel my wife to give up meat or drink or to follow me on my pilgrimages?

Anandaswami—No. She will come round to your way of life when she sees how much kinder, gentler and better you have become by following it. The best conversion to a new way of life is the silent one of ocular demonstration of its superiority. There is no virtue in an enforced diet or pilgrimage. Like castor oil, the merit thus taken in unwillingly will only be cast out.

Rangaraju—I understand. Now, bless me, for I must be going. I feel a new strength and a new weakness, strength at the spiritual insight gained, and weakness at the obstacles yet to be conquered.

Anandaswami—Blessings, my son. You are fortunate, for Brahmanandayogi has blessed you. May peace and success attend you! (*Rangaraju goes away, and Anandaswami goes back to the hall of the choultry*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

Six months later.—The room in the verandah of Rangaraju's bungalow. Rangaraju is sitting on a chair and looking up a small railway map of India and an All-India railway time-table. Subhadra enters the room.

She has a discontented look expressing scarcely-concealed resentment.

Subhadra—Why did you send for me?

Rangaraju—Come, and sit down. We are going on a pilgrimage for sixty days round the principal holy places.

Subhadra—I am not coming.

Rangaraju—Why? I wish very much you would come, but shall, of course, allow you full freedom to choose.

Subhadra—I don't want to come.

Rangaraju—But, why?

Subhadra—You know why. I don't believe in such things, and don't want to pretend that I do. I shall stay behind and look after the children. Mother and you can go.

Rangaraju—But, Subhadra, has not my changed way of life for the last six months made you a little more favourably inclined to things spiritual?

Subhadra—No. On the contrary, my former views have only hardened during this period. I have been missing the old robust and joyous life, the old happiness. But, what do you care for me and my happiness nowadays?

Rangaraju—I do care for you and your happiness as much now as I ever did. Only, the love has taken a different shape, just as the food and habits have. I never had a purer and more disinterested love for you than now. I am ready to die for you a thousand times over.

Formerly, it was all carnal love Now, it is love sublimated

Subhadra—Sublimation means evaporation

Rangaraju—Not with me Subhadra, why are you brooding and discontented?

Subhadra—I crave for the variety of the old days.

Rangaraju—Why should you? See mother She doesn't grumble.

Subhadra—She is of an ascetic turn of mind. Vegetarianism and water-drinking please her, but not me, She comes of a religious family and was never taking meat or wine. My father, a barrister like you, brought us up differently. You knew my habits when you married me, and took no objection to them. Now, you have become a more fanatical vegetarian than the most orthodox Brahmin. Gone are meat and wine from our house, gone are the merry dinner and bridge parties, clubs are forgotten, and, in the place of all these, only the eternal temple-going and scripture-reading and listening to rogues who pretend to have prospected the other world *They* are not fools. While they talk of 'real' riches to us, they are clever enough to take away some of our riches. It is *we* who are fools, to be deluded by them I crave for the freedom and variety and interest of the old days.

Rangaraju—I never forbade you from going to the club. I have also never compelled you to be a vegetarian against your will I have only eschewed meat and drink from this house, for my own spiritual development You can go to your relatives' houses and eat what you like.

Subhadra—For how many days am I to go round their houses? With what face am I to help myself to sumptuous dinners in their houses, knowing full well that I cannot invite them back to such dinners here? I don't go to the club because you never come there, and the other members only laugh at me as the wife of a crank. To add to all this, I am now only a wife in name, being denied all marital rights.

Rangaraju—Marriage is intended only for keeping the race going. We have got two children already, and can wait for two or three years before we have a third

Subhadra—But the flesh is strong.

Rangaraju—The will to curb it is stronger.

Subhadra—In you, not in me. Besides, how do you know that your view about the object of marriage is right?

Rangaraju—My inner voice tells me so. The scriptures also say so. And, Anandaswami has told me so.

Subhadra—The inner voice speaks as each man wants. The scriptures represent fossilised wisdom. Their injunctions are as much out of place in the modern world as the pterodactyls, mammoths, mastodons and dinosaurs. As for Anandaswami, he has had no experience of married life, and is no proper guide to be consulted on matters of sex. I rue the day he came to our house.

Rangaraju—Don't say so. He is one of the holiest men living. He has saved my soul.

Subhadra—And blasted mine

Rangaraju—What do you mean? What exactly do you want?

Subhadra—I want the variety of the old days I want to be treated as a young wife, and not like an eighty-year old dame with no other ambition than for a seat in heaven

Rangaraju—How can I grant your demands consistently with my principles? I cannot change my new way of life

Subhadra—Not for my sake?

Rangaraju—No, not for a thousand worlds.

Subhadra—And, yet, you just now said that you were ready to die for me a thousand times over.

Rangaraju—Yes, that I am willing to do. Physical death is nothing, but spiritual death is not to be thought of.

Subhadra—They say that people who really love with their whole souls will face even spiritual death cheerfully for the sake of the beloved.

Rangaraju—Those are all people in the toils of lust, people unacquainted with higher values.

Subhadra—A grain of red-hot reckless love is better than a ton of higher values

Rangaraju—Is your decision not to accompany us on the pilgrimage final?

Subhadra—Yes.

Rangaraju—Where has your old enthusiasm for travel gone?

Subhadra—If you had been the old Rangaraju, bright, cheerful, witty, passionate and gay, I would have jumped at your offer. But, not now, oh, not now. I prefer to stay behind. At least I shall not hear the cant of priests, greedy for pelf, regarding the other world, I shall not see the payment of money for registering berths in heaven. But, what is the use of talking to you? You don't pay the least attention to it You don't even get angry. From the life-giving spring water, which was your old self, you have now become insipid distilled water manufactured by others in their laboratory. Well, can I go now?

Rangaraju—Yes. You will regret later on that you didn't accompany us.

Subhadra—I think not. *(goes away)*

Rangaraju—(To himself) She is as unconverted as ever. But, the darkest watch of the night precedes the dawn. Now, let me jot down the itinerary, *(Takes a piece of paper and begins to write down the places and timings).*

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV

Two months later —Rangaraju's bungalow in Madras. Time 3 p. m. Rangaraju, who has just returned from his pilgrimage, comes out to the verandah with Subhadra.

They sit at a table and take tea. Rangaraju is in high spirits. Subhadra looks dejected and sad.

Rangaraju—I am glad to be back and be with you and the children again. But what a glorious sixty days we had in the Pilgrims' Special! We went to Tungabhadra, Pandharpur, Nasik, Poona, Dwaraka, Muttra, Brindaban, Delhi, Agra, Haridwar, Benares, Gaya, Prayag, Calcutta, Kamakhya, Puri, Simhachalam, Badrachalam, Tirupati, Srirangam, Madura and Rameswaram A pity you missed all these sights! I daresay you regret now that you didn't come with us. *(Subhadra's eyes fill with tears)* Why, you are about to weep What is the matter? Don't weep, my dear, but tell me what is troubling you *(rises and pats her on the back Subhadra sobs and is about to speak)* Oh, here is Thimmaraju A curse on the fellow! Just when I wanted to be alone with you and to have a quiet chat with you, here is this man butting in We must, for politeness sake, receive him and pretend as if we are glad to see him.

Subhadra (rises)—I am going in. I hate the sight of him

Rangaraju—But, he has seen you already He may think it strange.

Subhadra—I don't care what he thinks *(goes in)*

Rangaraju (Aside)—I can't make this out I thought that she would have liked to meet him and have a chat with him. Still, I am glad that she has shaken off her liking for his company and tall stories. I wonder what

the reason is for this sudden change. (*Aloud*) Hullo, Thimmaraju, come and sit down and have some tea.

(Enter Thimmaraju, a handsome man of 32 with a military moustache, graceful dhoti, swaggering turban, black alpaca coat, and a valuable jewelled watch with a heavy gold chain prominently displayed. He sits on the chair vacated by Subhadra).

Thimmaraju—I just had my tea. But, still I shall have a cup (*takes a cup of tea*) Where have you been gallivanting about all these days?

Rangaraju—Oh, we had a glorious sixty days' trip in the Pilgrims' Special. We went to Tungabhadra, Pandharpur, Nasik, Poona, Dwaraka, Muttra, Brindaban, Delhi, Agra, Haridwar, Benares, Gaya, Prayag, Calcutta, Kamakhya, Puri, Simhachalam, Bhadrachalam, Tirupati, Srirangam, Madura and Rameswaram.

Thimmaraju—A pretty extensive tour. Well, let us have it bit by bit What was there at Tungabhadra except the river?

Rangaraju—Of course, the main attraction is the river. But there is holy Mantsala close by, with the Raghavendraswami Mutt there. People say that when Sir Thomas Munro was about to resume the Inam [1] of the Mutt, the original *Swami* [2] appeared before him in person in a dream and made him desist. (*Thimmaraju laughs*). Why do you laugh? It may be true.

1 A grant of land, usually tax-free, to an institution or person.

2 A monk, a sage.

Thimmaraju—I laughed at the turn events have taken, at the necessity for the old *Swami* to appear in person to save his Inam. But, when Kshatriyas take to vegetarianism and endless pilgrimages, what else could the poor *Swami* do?

Rangaraju—Do you consider vegetarianism bad?

Thimmaraju—No. It is good for the Brahmins and other classes who do not have to fight. It is not good for the fighting classes like us. We have always to kill enemies A white-hearted vegetarian, how can he kill, or be killed? His hand will tremble at the thought of killing, and his heart at the thought of being killed. Why, the poor fool is even afraid of rats and cows

Rangaraju—Some vegetarians have fought as bravely as any men on earth What about the Mahratta Brahmin generals like Chimnaji Appa, Madhava Rao Peishwa and Trimbak Rao Mama?

Thimmaraju—They were merely generals who planned the campaigns, and not soldiers in the rank and file who fought the battles and endured the real hardships of war. My dear man, make the tiger a vegetarian, and it will begin to run away from a cow. Feed a kite on mere rice, and it will flee from a snake. Do you think that our lawgivers were fools when they said that Kshatriyas could take meat and drink? War and vegetarianism are two incompatible things. So long as war lasts, there will be a necessity for meat-eating for those who fight.

Rangaraju—Then, let war cease!

Thimmaraju—The deer may as well proclaim peace in the depths of the forest, as the vegetarians in the counsels of the nations. My friend, if there is to be peace in the forest, it is the lion, the tiger, the leopard, the bear and the other carnivorous animals who will have to bring it about by mutual arrangement, and not the deer, the rabbit, the buffalo and the squirrel. So too, if there is to be peace in the world, it is the fighting races, the English, the French, the German, the Italians, the Japanese, the Russians and the Americans who will have to bring it about, and not vegetarians from India.

Rangaraju—We vegetarians will preach peace, and the others will listen to us.

Thimmaraju—When the others so listen, then vegetarians will lead, but not till then. When universal peace reigns in the world, you may count me also as an advocate of vegetarianism. Till then, a chop and a drop now and then for all Kshatriyas, for all destined to fight.

Rangaraju—What about the Brahmins?

Thimmaraju—I don't like to see a Brahmin of our parts eat meat, any more than I like to see a fighting Kshatriya leave off meat. Each caste must follow its Dharma[1], so say our scriptures.

Rangaraju—Our scriptures prohibit the eating of beef for all Hindus in this age. You have yourself told

1. Law of Righteousness.

me that you ate beef in Mesopotamia. How do you justify it?

Thimmaraju—I don't justify it at all. Necessity made me eat it, and necessity knows no laws. I came back, and did a *prayaschittam*[1]

Rangaraju—Will a *prayaschittam* cure you of sins?

Thimmaraju—It must If temple-going secures merit, surely there is nothing unusual in a *prayaschittam*, which is a combination of repentance and reform, washing away a sin Well, I hope I have convinced you that there is no sense in your being a vegetarian.

Rangaraju—No, you have not convinced me. I have no intention at all of fighting. Nor has my wife. So we are justified in remaining strict vegetarians.

Thimmaraju—I don't agree. What about your children? Your son may like to fight when he grows up. Why make him a peaceful and timorous grass-eater? Again, does even your wife approve of this change? Her father was known to eat everything alive, except man. She was brought up in his house Did she consent to this change?

Rangaraju—I introduced it.

Thimmaraju—How can you justify your act which has deprived your wife of her right to have the diet allowed by the scriptures?

Rangaraju—Have I not the right to improve her?

1 Purificatory ceremony, literally, "again pure."

Thimmaraju—By persuasion or by coercion?

Rangaraju—By persuasion

Thimmaraju—Then, persuade somebody, me for instance, not subject to your control.

Rangaraju—You are a confirmed meat-eater, and an obstinate devil. I don't think that I can ever persuade you.

Thimmaraju—How do you know that your wife is not as obstinate as me? Could you have persuaded her father?

Rangaraju—No

Thimmaraju—Like father, like daughter. So, how can you hope to persuade your wife?

Rangaraju—Because she is my wife. Her love for me will make her do what I want.

Thimmaraju—When love for her will not make you even allow her the food she wants? Seems unlikely. Still, if you want a fair trial, give her the freedom to choose, and merely deliver your persuasive sermons, and see the result. She will revert to meat and drink in a moment. She will go back to the variety of the old days.

Rangaraju—The variety of the old days! The very phrase used by my wife before! Did she complain to you also?

Thimmaraju—I was overhearing her when she was complaining to my wife.

Rangaraju—So, she has been complaining all round, has she?

Thimmaraju—Don't be a fool. She came round to see my wife who is ailing, as you know. Then, in casual conversation, she expressed the above sentiment. Does n't look, old man, as if your persuasion has hit the bull's eye, does it?

Rangaraju—Still, I didn't expect this of Subhadra.

Thimmaraju—You fanatics expect too much from all except yourselves Why should not your wife complain to her friend? You have denied her freedom of diet Do you want to deny her freedom of speech also? My friend, I cannot exactly admire the peace you contemplate, seeing the tyranny it involves.

Rangaraju—When did my wife come and complain to your wife?

Thimmaraju—Not once. She complained whenever she came.

Rangaraju—How often did she come during my absence?

Thimmaraju—Almost daily during the first ten days after you left You know that my wife had her confinement and lost her child only ten weeks ago, and that she has been ailing ever since, and that she and your wife are cousins and have been chums from their childhood.

Rangaraju—But, why should she complain day after day? And behind my back too?

Thimmaraju—I say, did she not complain to you also? That is what she told my wife.

Rangaraju—Yes, so she did. But she told your wife that too in your hearing?

Thummaraju—You forget that your wife and mine have no secrets between them. And, as for me, ever since my wife's confinement, I am always at home except in the evenings when I go to the club.

Rangaraju—So, she was coming to your house when you were in?

Thummaraju—Yes What is there odd in that, old man? Has your recent reform meant also a revision of your ideas regarding women's freedom? Are you for cooping them up again? Have you forgotten your old advocacy of freedom for women?

Rangaraju—I don't remember what I was advocating before.

Thummaraju—Why, has your protracted tour exhausted you? I think I shall leave you, then Take some rest, old chap. Knocking about temples, with meals at irregular times, doesn't improve one's health or temper or nerves.

(Thummaraju goes. Rangaraju sits brooding. Nagamma comes).

Nagamma—I want to tell you something. Come to your office room, and see that nobody interrupts us. *(Rangaraju follows her into the office room in the verandah and shuts the door)*

Rangaraju—Well, mother, what is it? Is it about Subhadra?

Nagamma—Yes How did you guess it !

Rangaraju—Mother, what is it ? Out with it !

Nagamma—Our nurse was telling me that, during the first ten days of our trip, Subhadra was daily dining with Thimmaraju. It is said that lots of chickens and mutton were got prepared by Thimmaraju for her through expert cooks Some choice liquors also were got by him. It seems that the neighbourhood was thick with rumours.

Rangaraju—In Thimmaraju's house ? Then, why did she exhibit such an aversion for his company just now ? Was it all a pose ? It cannot be I am convinced of it. Mother, does any other body speak to it besides the nurse ?

Nagamma—Mangamma also said that one day she saw Subhadra and Thimmaraju taking meals together at his house and that they asked her to go and play. Son, let us allow Subhadra to eat here itself ,what she likes, and let her not go about like this and become the subject of idle gossip.

Rangaraju—Send Subhadra. I want to ask her about these dinners with Thimmaraju. She will not tell me a lie.

Nagamma—Don't tell her that I told you, or that the nurse or Mangamma told me. She loathes tale-bearers like poison.

Rangaraju—All right. Go and send her.

Nagamma—Don't get furious with her. You yourself gave her permission to go to her relatives' houses and take meat and wine. After all, Subhadra was brought

up by her father and you, till the last few months, in western ways. She cannot change all on a sudden. Besides, Thimmaraju is your cousin, and his wife is her cousin, and she might have gone to their house like this because of this relationship. So don't get furious with her. Hers is a very sensitive nature.

Rangaraju—All right, mother. Send her to me here. *(Nagamma goes in and sends Subhadra Subhadra enters the room Rangaraju bolts the door. Subhadra looks very nervous and is on the brink of tears)*

Rangaraju—Subhadra, what is all this I hear about you and your visits to Thimmaraju during our tour? Have you been taking meat and drink with him when we were away?

Subhadra—(Hangs down her head and sheds tears) Yes.

Rangaraju—Alone?

Subhadra (sobbing)—Yes.

Rangaraju (highly agitated)—Is there anything more, Subhadra? Has anything else taken place between you and Thimmaraju? Tell me the truth. Oh, my brain is on fire. Answer me at once! *(quivers with anxiety).*

Subhadra (in a voice broken with sobs)—I cannot tell you a falsehood. In an evil moment I succumbed. My god, how I have repented since! Why am I alive to tell you all this?

Rangaraju—O Mangamma, O Surayya, O my god, my Krishna! *(falls down and rolls on the ground*

Subhadra goes to lift him) Don't touch me, woman. *(Rises up)* Tell me, when did all this begin ?

Subhadra—It began and ended one day soon after you had gone on your trip He made me dead drunk and then took mean advantage of me in my helpless condition. I came back home crushed with shame and sorrow. I was about to shoot myself dead. But I desisted because the children would have been left forlorn, and also left alone to face the police enquiry which would follow. Besides, I wanted you to know the truth, and not to grieve unnecessarily for me, thinking that your new way of life had made me commit suicide, instead of my own sin. I wanted to confess everything to you as soon as I could be alone with you to-day after tea, and to leave you to deal with me as you deemed fit. Meanwhile, he came.

Rangaraju—Can you give me your solemn assurance that all this did not begin earlier ?

Subhadra—Absolutely. My god, what do you mean ?

Rangaraju—After your confession, nothing can be taken for granted I wanted to be certain at least about Mangamma and Surayya As you have not told me a lie till now, I think that I can believe you about this.

Subhadra (weeps as if her heart would break)—Oh, it is absolutely true I swear to it. I have sinned, and you can deal with me in any way you like. But, oh, love the little dears as before. I implore you in the name of Krishna whom you adore. *(falls at his feet)*

Rangaraju—Rise up. By ancient Raju custom, an unfaithful wife is at once put to death. But Krishna's

name shall not be invoked in vain. My *Guru* also has asked me to forgive any sin when the sinner owns up the sin, and begs for forgiveness and swears not to commit it again, and I have solemnly promised to do so. My god, that it should have come to this! But the *Guru* must be obeyed. To-morrow morning, at 3 a.m, before any others are up and awake. I shall do my *pooja*[1] to Krishna, and light the lamp, and you shall swear, with cow's milk in hand, before the Supreme Lord's picture and lamp, that you will never misbehave again, and shall then drink the milk Then I shall spare your life though I shall never know you as wife again. (*Subhadra is about to speak*) Now, go away, and don't talk another word to me. Leave me! (*Subhadra is about to speak again*) Go! (*Subhadra goes away closing the door Rangaraju sits dazed for a minute Then the door is flung open by Mangamma and Surayya who rush in boisterously calling out, 'Daddy! Daddy!' Mangamma has a marble Taj in one hand and an ivory elephant in the other Surayya has a beautiful toy plane in one hand and a distended balloon in the other*).

Mangamma—Daddy, what a lot of pretty dolls you have brought for me! Granny gave them to me just now. Oh, I love the Taj and the elephant!

Surayya—And I love my plane and the packet of balloons. See daddy, I have made this balloon as big as a melon

Mangamma—But, daddy, why is mummy weeping?

Rangaraju—Darling, do you love daddy or mummy more?

1. Ritual worship

Mangamma—I love both equally, daddy.

Rangaraju—And you, Surayya?

Surayya—I love you more, daddy.

Rangaraju—Why?

Surayya—Because I like you, daddy

Rangaraju—(takes Surayya and embraces him and kisses him on the cheeks) May the Lord protect you from all harm!

Mangamma—And me, daddy?

Rangaraju (with tears in his eyes)—And you also, darling

Mangamma—Why do you too weep, daddy?

Rangaraju—It is nothing, darling Now, both of you run along and play! *(they both go out Enter Nagamma)*

Nagamma—You look distraught, my son What did Subhadra tell you?

Rangaraju—Mother, don't ask me anything to-night. My mind is unsettled now. To-morrow it may get settled. Now, leave me mother. I want no food for the night. *(Nagamma goes out Rangaraju bolts the door and is engaged in reading the Bhagavatha*

(CURTAIN)

1. A sacred book of the Hindus dealing with the life of Krishna.

ACT V

(The prayer room in Rangaraju's house that night. Time 3 a m The door is bolted from inside. A light is burning before the picture of Sri Krishna. A vase of milk stands close by with sacred basil leaves in it. A dagger lies unsheathed by the side of the picture. Rangaraju and Subhadra sit facing the picture. The worship is just over.

Rangaraju—Before this holy picture of Krishna and his sacred lamp, take some milk in hand, confess your misdeed with Thimmaraju, beg my pardon, and swear never to misbehave again. Then I shall forgive you and spare your life though I shall never know you again as wife, or have any more child by you. Come, shall I pour the milk?

Subhadra—My life is nothing. I would have myself put an end to it that very day. I shall gladly part with it even to-day. If you really mean to forgive me because of your promise to your *Guru*, let it be a complete forgiveness, just as your *Guru* ordered

Rangaraju—What exactly do you mean?

Subhadra—That there should be no reservations as regards this forgiveness, that I should be given hopes of being treated as a forgiven wife, and not merely as a forgiven sinner. I am prepared to wait till you are satisfied that I have truly repented and become a new woman. But I do not want to live, and would much rather die, if you will never know me as wife at all

hereafter I do not want to drag on the degraded existence of a half-forgiven sinner That will only degrade you and me instead of ennobling either of us.

Rangaraju—How can I ever dream of treating you as wife hereafter ? The very thought of having relations with you, polluted you, will be a sin. How can any child of mine come forth from such a body ?

Subhadra—Remember the street-girl May Flint with whom you had an affair in your student days in London, as you yourself told me at the very beginning of our married life Did I object to live with you as wife, thereafter ? Did I call your body polluted, or refuse to have a child by you ? So, give me some hope of being treated as a wife at some time in the future and I shall at once take the oath you want Else, I must refuse.

Rangaraju—My god, a man's sins are constantly turning up against him at the most unexpected times, and he deserves it. I didn't expect that you would remember and mention May Flint to me now To prevent an affair like that ever recurring, I have resolved never more to give any concession to the flesh. My sex life is over.

Subhadra—If you really mean to keep your *Guru's* injunction, you must grant my prayer. Else, yours will be but a hollow forgiveness, and not the full forgiveness enjoined by your *Guru*.

Rangaraju—Who are you to interpret my *Guru's* injunction ?

Subhadra—Ask him, and he is sure to agree with me. I demand no more of you than what I freely gave you without your having to ask for it.

Rangaraju—I cannot grant your request That is certain

Subhadra—Then, kill me I don't want this hollow forgiveness, this husk without the grain, this word without the content I don't want the loveless life you are vouchsafing to me. By Raju custom, I have deserved to die. Kill me then, and I shall not blame you, for you will be only following the standards of old, and not claiming to act by a superior and more moral one But I refuse to accept your hollow forgiveness and to live a degraded life for ever more Kill me. Don't hesitate There is the dagger.

Rangaraju—What! You want to die? You won't swear?

Subhadra—No. Not on your terms

Rangaraju (*in a temper*)—Swear at once, and prevent me from committing deadly sin Here, I shall pour the milk into your hands.

Subhadra—No, Don't It is all useless, unless you are willing to keep to your *Guru's* injunction to the very letter.

Rangaraju (*in a rage*)—Swear at once, or I shall not be responsible for what I do. (*takes her right hand by force and pours some milk into it*) Now, swear, and don't force me to kill you.

Subhadra—I won't swear unless you promise as desired.

Rangaraju—I won't promise. That is as certain as there is a God in heaven

Subhadra—Then, I too won't swear That too is as certain as there is a God in heaven

Rangaraju (*picks up the dagger in a fury*)—Swear at once, or I shall kill you on the spot.

Subhadra—No, a thousand times no Kill me and be done with it (*throws down the milk from her hand and faces him*)

Rangaraju (*in uncontrollable rage*) Born a Raju, you have committed adultery, punishable by ancient caste custom with death you have disgraced my ancestors and descendants You have brought me to shame and ignominy by your misconduct with that old toad Thimmaraju And now you have the brazenness to tell me to my face that you will not swear unless you are given an impossible promise, and to defy me to kill you Die, you wretch ! (*stabs her in the heart She falls down without a word Rangaraju reels back horrified Then he cries aloud*)

My God what have I done ! Subhadra ! Subhadra ! (*tries to pick her up*) Her body is limp and lifeless She is dead ! I must go and tell the police what I have done. (*opens the door and rushes out towards the Police station with the bloodstained dagger in hand*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT VI

(Two days later The interview room in the Madras Penitentiary. Rangaraju, an under-trial prisoner, is talking to Nagamma who stands outside the bars. Mother and son are allowed to talk alone, jail officials standing by keeping an eye on the prisoner.)

Nagamma (weeps)—Oh, my son, why did you do it?

Rangaraju—Mother, that evening Subhadra confessed to me that she misbehaved with Thimmaraju during our absence My first impulse was to kill her forthwith. But, I remembered the solemn promise I had made to Anandaswami, and, with a great effort at self-control, resolved to forgive her if she confessed her sin before Krishna, expressed her repentance, aed swore, with the sacred milk in hand, never to misbehave again. In the morning, at 3 A M., I asked her to swear. She refused to swear unless I promised to treat her as wife. I refused. Then she too stubbornly refused to take the oath, and upset the sacred milk, and defied me to kill her. The dagger was near. I flew into a rage, and stabbed her in the heart.

Nagamma—Oh, my son, have all the pilgrimages culminated only in this? No doubt she sinned and deserved to die, by ancient Raju custom. And, yet, I feel that she must have been seduced by Thimmaraju and caught in his carefully-spread net of dainty meat dishes

and choice wines denied to her in our house. She must have repented sincerely, for she looked ever so sad on our return. I was heartbroken when I rushed to your room on hearing the noise and found her lying dead and covered with blood So young and dead! (*Sobs*).

Rangaraju—I too shall be dead soon, mother, The courts will see to it. So, it will be the case of a life for a life.

Nagamma—What do you mean, my son? Surely, they will not sentence you to death for this? Several of your ancestors have killed even unfaithful dancing-girls and concubines, and escaped scot-free Surely an unfaithful wife gives greater provocation Even under the present laws, I understand that the killing of an unfaithful wife, in sudden rage at hearing her confession of immorality, is punishable only with transportation for life.

Rangaraju—No If the murder is premeditated, as in this case, a death sentence is given. If I had killed her in the evening, as soon as she confessed, it might have been a sentence of transportation. As I killed her only in the morning, after mature deliberation and preparation, it cannot be but a death sentence.

Nagamma—Oh, why did you conceal her confession and your dreadful intent from me that evening? I thought that it was only her dinners with Thimmaraju which were worrying you after your talk with Subhadra Had I known about her confession, I would have been alert and awake, and would have prevented this deed But, I cannot lose you as well as her. Who is to know that she

confessed in the evening itself, and not merely in the morning? Say that she confessed only in the morning, and that you killed her at once in sudden rage.

Rangaraju—What! Add to my sin by uttering a lie! She, with the carnal passions strong in her, was not afraid to die. Shall I, who profess to have shaken off my carnal passions, be afraid of death? Besides, what shall I do with a life so saved? The best thing for me to do now is to die.

Nagamma—O, my son, don't say so. For saving your life, a little lie like that is permissible

Rangaraju—No I am surprised to hear a devout woman like you say so Truth is God, and truth must be uttered regardless of consequences

Nagamma—But, think of the children. Who will look after them if you too are gone?

Rangaraju—You will look after them, mother dear. You will not want anything. There is plenty of money saved by me.

Nagamma—Who cares for your money? It is my son I want, not the pelf he has heaped up. Son, think of the family reputation also. An unchaste daughter-in law, and a son hanged for murder!

Rangaraju—That cannot be helped. Evils often come in pairs Forget Subhadra, forget me, and concentrate on the children

Nagamma—Son, you must utter the small lie for my sake. I shall die heart-broken if you are hanged. A

sentence of transportation, though horrible, is heaven itself in comparison While life lasts, hope lasts

Rangaraju—Mother, I must refuse Truth is my God and my soul What availeth a man if he gains a few miserable years of life, and loses his soul? No, mother dear, no! That is why I rushed to the police at once and told them everything before a vile desire to live, or your persuasion, overcame my instinctive impulse to own up to everthing.

Nagamma—I am told that your statement to the police cannot be proved and can, in any event, be retracted.

Rangaraju—Mother, do you expect me to eat the food which I have vomitted, or to retract a statement which I have made voluntarily? I am going to have my confession recorded by the magistrate in another ten minutes Not one word of the truth will be withheld.

Nagamma—Don't make such a confession, my son, I implore you

Rangaraju—Mother dear, I must.

(*Enter Pichayya*)

Pichayya—Rangaraju, the Magistrate has come

Rangaraju—I am ready *Namaskar*, mother. (*goes out with Pichayya*).

Nagamma—Oh, my god! What a fate! (*sobs and wails and is led out of the prison gently by a warder*).

(CURTAIN)

ACT VII

(The Madras Penitentiary. Three months later. Time 5- a.m. Rangaraju in the condemned cell. Anandaswami stands outside the bars and talks to him.)

Anandaswami—I am heart-broken to see you here. I returned to Madras from my tour only yesterday, and was casually told about this dreadful affair, and also told that, if I want to see you at all, I must do so before 6 a.m this morning. So, I rushed to the authorities and got the permission just in time. But, my child, why did you do this act? Did I not ask you to forgive any sin if it were confessed, and reform promised, and pardon sought?

Rangaraju—Yes, but she refused to confess before Krishna and swear never to sin any more unless I gave her an impossible promise You told me that I should forgive only if there was repentance and a promise to reform. As she refused to swear to reform herself, I killed her. How did I transgress your commands?

Anandaswami—I was a fool to have taught you truths you could not comprehend I told you to forgive those who owned up their sins, promised never more to commit them, and begged to be excused for the past, and to treat them thereafter as if they had never wronged you in thought, word or deed. When did I ask you to kill those who refused to own up, or to reform? The fire useful for cooking, you have used for burning. You have been a slave of ideas instead of being their master. The result

is that a bright lamp is extinguished by a tempest, though there is plenty of oil left. My child, my child, what a fate is yours! I sought for you on the heights, and you were not there; I looked for you on the slopes, and you were not there too, I searched for you on the plains, and you were not even there, then, one glance I took at the abyss down below, and, oh, I found you there! *(sheds tears)*

Rangaraju—Oh, Swamiji, don't weep It unnerves me at the very time when I require all my nerves to face death calmly. She died calmly, and I too should do so I committed this deed when the brain was on fire, the mind in the melting pot and reason almost gone. So, it was not your disciple who did this act, but a brute who had taken his place for the time being.

Anandaswami—Why did you, then, say in the court that you did the act deliberately, and with premeditation and forced the judge to pass a death sentence on you despite the inclination on his part to award the lesser sentence of transportation if there was some kind of plausible reason put forward? Why did you contradict your mother when she swore that you did this in a sudden rage?

Rangaraju—I did the act after deliberation and preparation. I had fully resolved in the night to kill her in the morning if she refused to swear, and I had kept the dagger ready for the purpose.

Anandaswami—Then, why did you say that the brain was on fire, the mind in the melting pot, and reason almost gone?

Rangaraju—Because that is also true Even a mad man, Swamiji, can plan out crimes. Much more so, a man in a rage I was a barrister, and an officer of the court. I was bound to aid it in doing justice. This was a case for a death sentence, and I aided towards that consummation, What could I have gained by living with this terrible crime on my mind? The ghost of Subhadra would have haunted me all the time, her apparition would never have disappeared for a moment. I could not have faced the children after having killed their mother. So, I refused to see them yesterday when my mother brought them, though my eyes ached to see them and my arms to embrace them. Poor little dears, what an awful lot is theirs! I pray to God that they at least may grow up happy and joyous, free from the sins of their parents and the sorrows which have blasted our lives. My heart bleeds also for my mother who has to suffer all these humiliations and agonies at this ripe old age. But, for my own hanging, I feel no sorrow. I only long to die. Death is far more welcome to me than life. It means a chance to begin again That is why I refused to put in a petition for mercy.

Anandaswami—But, why did you not put in a petition for mercy and be purified by reform and suffering?

Rangaraju—I deseved no mercy. Besides, to be shut up for fifteen or twenty years in a prison is to me, and

will be to many others, unbearable. Death we can face, lifelong imprisonment we cannot face. To be caged like a beast or bird is intolerable for sensitive souls. They can endure prison only if they feel that they have not deserved it, or have entered it for a worthy cause, like imprisonment by the enemy in war or for a great political object, like winning a country's freedom. But it is different for minds which are guilty and troubled. Prison for them is a torture chamber That is why I preferred and still prefer death

(*Enter Pichayya*)

Pichayya—I am sorry to intrude. But it is time to take the prisoner. The thing is fixed up for 6 A.M sharp.

Rangaraju—Swamiji, will you be present? It will be a great consolation to me You will see me die calmly.

Anandaswami—No, my child. I shall be with you in spirit. I cannot be so in body as it is against my creed to be willingly present at any taking of life. Pray to God to forgive your sin.

Rangaraju (*prays*)—

"Oh Thou who did'st with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Pre-destined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to sin!
Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth did'st make
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake.
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd -Man's forgiveness give-and take!"

Anandaswami (Smiles)—

My son, such witty hits are not helpful prayers. They are only "sweet poison" taken in like opium or ganja by deluded souls. You are now at the threshold of the next world where such counterfeit coins will not pass. You know well, and indeed told me just now, that you yourself were responsible for the deed. So, utter a real and helpful prayer to God in all humility and sincerity. The time for argument is over. The time for judgment has come.

Rangaraju—Then, pray with me, swamiji, the last prayer.

Anandaswami and Rangaraju (pray)

"Lead us, oh Lord,
From the unreal to the real,
From darkness to light,
From death to immortality."

Anandaswami—Now, I must go. . *(goes away with tears streaming down his cheeks)*

Rangaraju—Pichayya, lead. I follow.

Pichayya—I am sorry for you, Rangaraju. What a fate has overtaken you!

Rangaraju—Don't worry about me, Pichayya. When I am hanged, don t think that a criminal has been done to death. Think rather that a blundering human being has

left his useless body and mind behind and adventured forth into a new world to start again with a new body and mind. You won't find me harrowing your feelings by an exhibition of panic, fright and cowardice. I shall mount the steps firmly and take the drop as a diver takes his plunge in his familiar river. For death is for me the only solution of the problem brought about by my sin and folly. A new life in another world is necessary to rectify the defects of this life which is past all mending and so is appropriately ending. Come. I am ready. Lead me, and, don't waste time in unnecessary sorrow. (*Pichayya, whose eyes are dim with tears, takes him towards the hanging place. Rangaraju walks with a firm and easy gait as if on a morning walk*)

(CURTAIN)

THE END.

SITA'S CHOICE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1. SRINIVAS, AN ACCOUNTANT.
2. MANGALA, HIS WIFE.
3. SITA, HIS DAUGHTER
4. VENGU, SITA'S HUSBAND.
5. ANDAMMAL, VENGU'S MOTHER.
6. RAJAGOPAL, SITA'S SISTER'S HUSBAND.
7. RATNAM, THE MONEY-LENDER IN WHOSE SHOP SRINIVAS WORKS.
8. ACHYUTH, A CLERK EMPLOYED IN IRAQ.
9. VEDARAM, VENGU'S FRIEND.

ACT I

A small house in a village called Krishnagiri overlooking the street which is to the east. It has a verandah, three rooms, a hall, and a kitchen on the ground floor, and a single big room upstairs There is a vegetable garden behind the house. There are two doors from the hall, one leading to the room to the right, and the other to the kitchen behind. Time 11 a. m.

Srinivas, a man of 46, with the expression of an overgrown boy, comes into the house from the foot-path leading to Palakkudi, and enters the hall. Mangala, a buxom matron of 42, with face and features expressing strength of character and a will to rule, has just finished combing her hair. She hastily puts the comb and mirror on a shelf, and meets her husband with obvious joy on her face.

Mangala—I have solved the problem of our Sita's marriage.

Srinivas (eagerly)—You don't mean to say so? Who is the boy?

Mangala—Vengu of Sivapuram.

Srinivas—My God! you don't call him a boy, do you? He is a widower, and is aged 40. Our Sita is only 14. Besides he is suffering from tuberculosis.

Mangala—All that is mere scandal. He is only 35. He has a touch of asthma, but certainly not tuberculosis. How people exaggerate! Asthma becomes tuberculosis, leucoderma leprosy, and shortsight blindness. Our Sita don't forget, is past 14. Of course, Vengu is a widower, but, then, you can't get a bachelor for the paltry bridegroom price of five hundred rupees we are offering.

Srinivas—So, there is a bridegroom price also on the top of all this?

Mangala—Of course, there is. Do you think any man of our parts will marry without a bridegroom price? Even widowers make heavy demands There are hundreds of fathers competing to marry off their daughters to them.

Srinivas—Has anybody competed for Vengu?

Mangala—Oh yes, two others were competing. But our Sita looks better than their girls. So, they closed with our offer.

Srinivas—I don't wonder. How degenerate the times are when an old sickly Vengu, can hope to marry a beautiful and intelligent girl, like Sita, who has stood first in her class in every subject and has won a gold medal for vocal music. My dear, have you thought of another thing? Vengu has no property whatever.

Mangala—What property had you when I married yo?u

Srinivas—Why do you unnecessarily drag *me* in? I have been seeing a great change in you, Mangala, ever since you paid that decree debt of one hundred rupees for

me five years ago. Rajagopal and you have been thereafter treating me with contempt Things have become worse since the second payment of seventy-five rupees a year after.

Mangala—Why should a married man like you get entangled with women? I had to pay your decree amounts from my hard-earned savings. I wonder why I did it.

Srinivas—Don't pretend to too much altruism. You did it so that you might not have the disgrace of having your husband sent to jail I too work hard and earn my bit.

Mangala—A fat lot you earn as accountant in Ratnam & Co., of Palakkudi! The pay you get is not enough for even your hotel and betel. This job has also made it easy for you to carry on with your women. Indeed, after those bogus promissory notes, I am even wondering whether you keep your accounts in your firm all right.

Srinivas (Angrily)—Mangala!

Mangala—Don't get angry. I only said that in joke. Ratnam and his assistants are too clever for you.

Srinivas—Much you know of them and of me!

Mangala—Twenty-five years of married life, my dear, ought to have taught me all about you

Srinivas—Some men can be sized up and understood in a year, some others not in a century.

Mangala (going close to him)—You mean it seriously? Have you a hidden side to your nature which I have not understood?

Srinivas—Even the decrees came as a surprise to you.

Mangala—The *decrees* did, but not the events which led up to them I knew about your past life all right. Out of sight, out of mind. Any new women, rich or poor, married or unmarried, handsome or ugly, seems to attract you The one in sight seems to hold sway over you. What a man!

Srinivas—Many men are like me. Only, you don't know about them.

Mangala—Should not married men love only their wives?

Srinivas—Yes, in theory. But, most of them are not able to act up to this principle in practice.

Mangala—Do you love these other women, or is it merely lust?

Srinivas—I have not understood the distinction. What is it?

Mangala—Lust is a mere selfish urge for your own pleasure, accompanied by a desire to get it as cheaply as possible. Love is the divine urge and makes you unselfish and willing to suffer anything for the sake of the beloved.

Srinivas—My dear, then, I have never had love towards any of these women.

Mangala (smiling)—What is your feeling towards me?

Srinivas—It is neither love nor lust, but conjugal duty.

Mangala (bitterly)—In other words, it is not even lust, but mere routine, the novelty having worn out long ago. Tell me, have you never felt love towards anybody?

Srinivas—Yes, I think that I love our children especially Sita. That is why I protest against your intended match.

Mangala—You protest, and do nothing more. Can you find a better bridegroom?

Srinivas—Where have I the time?

Mangala—You have time for your women, but not for discharging your duty for your daughter! Well, there is no other way out. I must marry Sita to Vengu, and avoid the disgrace of her attaining her age before marriage.

Srinivas—I protest, hut am, as usual, powerless to prevent you from doing as you like.

Mangala—You will have to give away the girl.

Srinivas—I shall give her away with my hands, but not with my heart.

Mangala—Hush, here she comes. *Enter Sita, a beautiful girl of fourteen, in a graceful blue saree, and with fresh jasmine flowers in her hair.*

Sita—So, father has come home? But, dad, you look dejected. Shall I recite a cheerful bit of poetry for you which I learnt yesterday?

Srinivas—Do, my dear.

Sita (recites).

The year's at the spring.
And day's at the morn,
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled,
The lark's on the wing,
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!

Srinivas—Good Where did you get it from?

Sita—From the Golden Treasury which Ganga's husband has sent me Father, how do you like this new saree mother bought for me two days ago?

Srinivas—It is lovely, my dear Where have you been?

Sita—To Lalita's marriage.

Srinivas—Lalita's husband is in the Indian Civil Service, is he not?

Sita—Yes. It is only a year since he returned from England. Lalita is very happy at the match. Why do you look so worried and miserable, father?

Srinivas—Do you know, Sita, that you yourself are going to be married in a fortnight?

(Sita has a look of surprise and curiosity).

Mangala—Yes, my dear, you are to be married on the tenth of next month to Vengu of Sivapuram

Sita—(consternation on her face)—Surely, not to old Andammal's son, mother?

Mangala—Yes, my dear He is only thirty-five years old, and has ever so good a mother You will be happy with him *(In a chastened tone)* You must be married soon, and this is the best I could manage Each girl gets the husband she is destined to get How can I afford to pay a heavy bridegroom price like Lalita's parents, though I can easily give a girl better than Lalita in every way? Alas, all our young men are only after money, and have no eyes for beauty or accomplishments in a poor girl

Srinivas—What do you say, Sita?

Mangala—What will she say? Does she not know our circumstances, and that we cannot possibly get a better bridegroom? Sita, go to the kitchen, and boil the milk *(Sita goes in, silent and sad Mangala says to Srinivas)* By the tenth of next month, I can take life easy No more hard grinding, no more bothering with cows and buffaloes and pickles and cowdung

Srinivas—What! Will you stop the entire milk, pickle and cowdung-cake trade?

Mangala—Perhaps not. But there will be a visible slackening. I shall let off steam for a while, and do just

the quantity of work that will be a pleasure and not a drudgery Oh, how I shall sit idle for hours together, and sleep for ten hours every day !

Srinivas—My dear, you too love idleness and sleep, then, like me I thought that you were a work fiend

Mangala—Nobody is Many appear to be work fiends in their heart-ache at their not having got the things they wanted, and their eagerness to get the things they want Now, come inside, and let us have our meals. Afterwards, we must write to Rajagopal, Ganga and Ranga asking them to come for the marriage. They will be ever so glad to hear of it

Srinivas—Hm !

Mangala—Come and take your meals without any more of your musings

(All go inside)

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

Srinivas's house a month later Time 2 p m The same hall as in Act I Mangala and Srinivas sitting.

Mangala (looking up from the account books she is perusing)—Seven hundred and fifty rupees gone over this marriage ! Five hundred in cash as bridegroom price, and two hundred and fifty for marriage expenses.

Srinivas—And the boy has no job or property. He has also a great number of debts

Mangala—We heard about the debts only at the marriage. He might have discharged everything with our five hundred rupees.

Srinivas—Ah, no He discharged some, but has many more.

Mangala—Why worry unnecessarily? Money is not constant. It comes and goes Few are absolutely free from debts, and none will be so for ever.

Srinivas—Yes, but few are without earnings of any kind

Mangala—But, don't you see that he is at present having this asthma which renders him unable to do work?

Srinivas—Unable to do work! Why, he cannot remain for fifteen minutes consecutively, without giving vent to a paroxysm of cough and wheezing terrific to behold. At the end of every one of these fits, he spits out phlegm which clings on to the floor with a tenacity which only a spade can remove My dear, my heart bleeds at the idea that our Sita is wedded to this man who was already wedded to this disease. Why did you choose him for darling Sita?

Mangala—Oh, I didn't know then that the disease was so bad After all, what can you see in a few minutes? So too, about his debts. I knew that he had no assests. But I did not know that he had debts.

Srinivas—Few people without assets are without debts Nature abhors a vacuum If assets depart, debts are sure to take their place, just as they teach in our schools that the cold air replaces the hot one when it goes up You ought to have known this

Mangala—Wisdom comes late You did not speak a word before the marriage about the possibility of Vengu's having debts, though you knew even then that he had no assets. Now that both of us have learnt for certain that he has debts, you speak of irresistible inferences, and vacuums.

Srinivas—I won't say that you are not right. But, what about the extent of the disease? Surely, you could have seen that?

Mangala—How? I saw him for a few minutes. During that period, he had no paroxysm. Andammal assured me that it was no more than a slight asthma which was rapidly getting better

Srinivas—What else could you expect her to do? Will the spider warn the fly of the dangers of the net it spreads? You ought to have seen the net, you who pride yourself on your cleverness and shrewdness

Mangala—Why did you not go and see the bridegroom yourself? As a man, you could have talked to him longer, and found out all about him. But you didn't care to go and have a look at the boy who was selected for your own daughter

Srinivas—I was busy.

Mangala—Busy! Busy! Busy! Not busy for Ratnam & Co., not busy for your women, busy only when it came to seeing and satisfying yourself about your daughter Sita's intended bridegroom!

Srinivas—You never asked me to see him Then, I could have found some time somehow

Mangala—Asked you! Why, is Sita such a stranger to you that I must needs request you, like a neighbour, to go and see the boy? The responsibility of parents does not end with the birth of the children, but only begins with it.

Srinivas—I relied on your judgment.

Mangala—Which turned out to be wrong, hopelessly wrong It was your elementary duty to have viewed the boy.

Srinivas—My dear, I admit my mistake But I relied too much on you You never made a mistake before.

Mangala—All people make mistakes some time or other And mine began with the selection of darling Sita's bridegroom. Oh, what sins I must have committed in my former births, thus to blast my daughter's life! Why did those people deceive us like this?

Srinivas—In dice and strife,
For life and wife,
In love and fun,
Lies have always won.

Mangala—I hate that ditty.

Srinivas—But it is a correct statement of what happens in this world, my dear.

Mangala—Andammal ought to have at least told me about the advanced nature of the disease

Srinivas—If she had spoken the truth, would you have given Sita in marriage to Vengu? Where would Andammal have got an unpaid cook and nurse, and a round sum to clear off her old debts, and renewed credit to contract new debts for Vengu's feeding and treatment?

Mangala—Is he undergoing regular treatment?

Srinivas—I dare say, not. Poor people cannot afford it. Doctors are not philanthropists, at any rate, not the able ones. A man like Subban, who destroyed half the eyesight of that handsome girl, Visalakshi, by pouring tincture of iodine into her eyes, mistaking it for argyrol, may volunteer to treat free, in order to keep the human burden of this world under control.

Mangala—Can such asthma as Vengu's be cured without regular treatment?

Srinivas—Can it be cured with regular treatment?

Mangala—Oh! Sita, I have made your life miserable! (*weeps*).

Srinivas—Don't weep What is past is past, and irrevocable Vengu is now Sita's husband. She is tied to him for life So, there is no use your crying over it. Sita may come back at any moment It will not be good for her to see this or hear such discussions Let us go up and close the accounts, and check the balance. (*Both go up*).

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

8 *Months later* *Time* 10 *a m.*

A small dirty, thatched house in Sivapuram wedged in between two other houses. The thatch on the house is old and rotten, and has not been renewed for two years. There is an ill-kept verandah in front facing the street. Behind it are two rooms, a small hall, and a kitchen. The hall is ill-lighted, and the floor is neglected, rough, and uneven On a bed on the floor lies Vengu, a consumptive-looking, prematurely-aged man of 40, with all his hair gone grey. He is wheezing and heaving after an exhausting fit of cough, and there is a world-weariness on his face. His mother, Andammal, a weak woman of 62, is sitting by the side of the bed

Vengu—Mother, I ought not to have married Sita. Why did you make me marry her when I was for waiting till I was assured of a cure? Now the doctor says that I cannot last long.

Andammal—When did he say that? Who told you?

Vengu—His face yesterday clearly indicated his views Then, when you took him to the next room to find out confidentially the real state of my health, I too followed on tip-toe and listened at the door, and heard what he told you, and then crept back to bed unnoticed.

Andammal—Why did you do this?

Vengu—I was anxious to know the truth from the doctor's own lips

Andammal—And what good did it do you?

Vengu—It has made me realise the great wrong I have done Sita in marrying her and blasting her life Oh, mother dear, why were you so insistent on the marriage though I was not for it?

Andammal—Our family was about to die out Our duty to our ancestors required that you should marry again, get children, and avert this catastrophe I was also getting old and feeble, and was diffident of cooking for you and attending on you efficiently, especially in years to come I didn't believe then, and don't believe now, that your disease was incurable or dangerous to life. These doctors often go wrong Now may I ask you one question? Why does Sita's case alone afflict you with sorrow, and not mine also?

Vengu—Sita is young.

Andammal—Why should the old suffer more than the young? At least the young will have robust health and will be able to look after themselves. But not so the old. Don't you think that Sita will be some kind of help to me in my old and feeble state?

Vengu—But she may not live here in case the doctor's prediction comes correct.

Andammal—Where else will she live?

Vengu—With her parents or sister.

Andammal—How do you know?

Vengu—I think so.

Andammal—So, she will have a far better lot than mine, even should the doctor's accursed opinion come right Hence, don't worry unnecessarily Now, I shall go and get your porridge ready (*Andammal goes into the kitchen*)

Vengu (*to himself*)—She has got the softest heart for me, but has been heartless in settling my marriage with Sita. But, what an abject coward was I to have weakly yielded to her and agreed to this marriage ! My scruples were overcome not only by my mother's arguments but also by selfish desire As soon as I saw Sita, I desired to marry her, and deluded myself that I would be cured soon. Oh, I am a wretch, a despicable wretch ! (*Sobs and gets a paroxysm of cough and spits out phlegm and lies down swaying on the bed Enter Vedaram, a well-kept schoolmaster aged 38*).

Vedaram—Why, Vengu, you seem to be getting worse.

Vengu—Yes What to do ? I have tried every kind of medicine, allopathic, ayurvedic, unani, siddha[1], and homoepoethic, but all to no good I get a little relief for a little while, and then the old disease comes back worse than ever. (*Coughs again*)

Vedaram—Don't strain yourself. I think you may be cured if you go to Madanapalle for some months.

Vengu—I have no money to try the experiment. Besides, many tell me that the improvement made at

1 The ayurvedic unani and siddha are indigenous systems of Indian medicine

Madanapalle lasts only as long as one continues in that climate I cannot hold out long So said the doctor yesterday But, death may be nothing compared to this living death.

Vedaram—Oh, don't say so What about your young wife ?

Vengu—Yes, I desire to live only for her sake If I die, it will be unutterably sad for her, poor thing But, what can be done ? It is my fate, and hers. (*goes into a paroxysm*)

Vedaram—Lie down, and take perfect rest Don't exert yourself in the least I shall see you later. (*goes out, but, when he has entered the street he sees Srinivas coming towards Vengu's house Srinivas signs to Vedaram, and takes him aside*)

Srinivas—How is Vengu ?

Vedaram—Very bad He cannot last long Oh, why did you give Sita in marriage to him after knowing that he had this terrible disease ?

Srinivas—We never knew the full extent of the disease till the day before the marriage Then it was too late.

Vedaram—Never would it have been too late to stop such a marriage

Srinivas—What would the public have said ?

Vedaram—Is the public's opinion to weigh before a girl's whole life and happiness ?

Srinivas—Alas, society has gone on the principle that one should be sacrificed so that many may live

Vedaram—An excellent principle, but this is not a case in point How do the many, society at large, profit by this sacrifice of Sita? It is a meaningless, useless, horrible sacrifice

Srinvas—Oh, what am I to do? What can I do?

Vedaram—Nothing much now Perhaps you may send Vengu to Madanapalle, and see whether he will recover there.

Srinvas—Where is the money to come from? We are very poor Vengu is, if anything, poorer And Madanapalle treatment is too costly for people of our type We can't dream of it What else can be done?

Vedaram—Nothing, except pray for the best Hullo, here comes your wife *(Mangala comes along the street)*

Mangala (to Srinivas)—How is Vengu to-day?

Srinvas—I have not seen him yet. Vedaram tells me that he is pretty bad.

Mangala—Oh! *(turning to Vedaram)* Is he worse than usual?

Vedaram—Yes, far worse

Mangala—Oh! *(sheds tears)* What shall I do now?

Vedaram—Pray for the best

Mangala—Yes If Sita's stars are good, everything will come off all right

Vedaram (Aside)—Why did they depend so much on stars? A little common ense before the selection of the

bridegroom would have been worth many stars, and saved this load of anxiety (*Aloud*) Yes.

Mangala (to Srinivas)—Let us go and have a look at Vengu

Vedaram—I too must go and get ready for my school. (*goes to his house*)

(Srinivas and Mangala enter Vengu's house, and find Vengu in a wild paroxysm of cough Srinivas goes and holds his head when coughing and spitting Enter Andammal with a pot of porridge)

Andammal (to Srinivas and Mangala)—Come in, come in When did you come?

Mangala—Just now.

Andammal—I was in the kitchen preparing this porridge, and so didn't see you come in. Please excuse me

Mangala—Oh, that is all right. Don't worry about that. What we worry about is Vengu's illness.

Andammal—Oh, what can I do? (*weeps*) Every treatment within my power I am trying. The varieties and quantities of medicines taken by him are simply amazing. But, oh, the medicines change, the disease remains the same.

Srinivas—It appears to be worse than usual to-day.

Andammal—Yes, Once or twice. Vengu even expressed a desire to see Sita.

Mangala—I shall bring her now I have left her in Raji's house talking to her friend She too wanted to see him

Vengu (brightens up)—Did she ?

Mangala—Yes, *(goes out)*

Vengu (to Srinivas)—I am very sorry that she cannot see me in a better state. *(Sobs and gets into a paroxysm)*

Andammal—Lie down quietly, and don't talk or exert yourself in any way

Vengu (after the fit)—Oh, I cannot I have kept silent long enough, and am not any better Is life to be one long silence ? It will be worse than death then

Andammal—Drink the porridge *(Vengu begins to drink, but after two spoonfuls, gets a terrible fit of coughing, and vomits all that he has taken, and then lies down gasping for breath on the bed Mangala enters with Sita Sita shows involuntary signs of repulsion on her face on seeing the vomitted matter and the state of Vengu)*

Mangala (to Srinivas)—Why, has he become worse still ?

Vengu (seeing Sita, brightens, and says to Andammal)—Mother, take her inside till you have cleared this here It must be a trying sight for her. Oh, why can't I get one hour's freedom from this fell disease ? *(gets another paroxysm)*

Mangala (aside)—If I allow Sita to remain here longer, she will get a rooted dislike for him. I must

therefore take her away at once. (*Aloud*) What he wants is absolute rest So we shall go away now, and come again with Sita when he is better. Sita, prostrate to your husband and get his blessings (*Sita prostrates*).

Vengu (blesses Sita)—May you be happy! (*At this moment, the bronze plate with Andammal slips and falls down with a loud clash on the floor All look scared as it is an ill omen Sita is startled and sheds tears*)

Vengu—Don't weep, my dear The gods will take pity on you, and cure me (*a lizard falls on him and darts away All again look scared at this fresh ill omen Mangala and Srinivas depart with Sita Vengu lies down again, and Andammal is seen clearing the mess*).

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV

(Srinivas's house in Krishnagiri, fifteen days afterwards Time 3 p m Enter Srinivas through the street door, very dejected and downcast. Instead of going to the hall, he sneaks upstairs Mangala sees him go up, and follows him

Mangala—What is the matter with you? Are you sick?

Srinivas—I am sick at heart

Mangala—But, why? Tell me plainly what the matter is.

Srinivas—The plain unvarnished fact is that we are all paupers without a home now.

Mangala—Without a home ! What are you talking about ? We have this house. It may not be a palace, but it is a home

Srinivas—It is ours no more.

Mangala—What ! ! !

Srinivas—I have executed a sale deed for it They will presently come for delivery

Mangala—Why did you execute a sale deed ? I do not understand. To whom have you executed the sale deed ?

Srinivas—To Ratnam & Co.

Mangala—Why ? What price did they pay ?

Srinivas—Nothing

Mangala—Nothing ? Are you mad ?

Srinivas—I wish I were That might have saved us.

Mangala—Oh, tell me at once. Had you borrowed any money from them ?

Srinivas—No. But I had taken their money to the extent of two thousand rupees. Everything was found out when Ratnam's son, who has newly passed the G D A, checked the accounts and vouchers yesterday.

They threatened me with a prosecution unless I at once sold this house to them for the amount embezzled

I had to comply with their commands I executed the sale-deed, and it was registered yesterday itself. Only then did they leave me *(Mangala sits stunned and dazed, with a stony glare in her eyes, and says nothing).*

Srinivas—I wish I were dead

Mangala—I wish even more that I were dead, and spared this horrible fate Oh, what did you do with the money?

Srinivas—You know it, You yourself hinted at it long ago

Mangala—Oh, I said it then in joke, and not in earnest You don't mean to tell me that you spent all the two thousand rupees on your women?

Srinivas—Alas, that is the truth The wretched creatures rob their victims without mercy

Mangala—Oh, has my house also become fuel for lust? You are the most heartless man who ever lived

Srinivas—Caught in the toils of lust, a man never realises how fast he spends his money, and what permanent injury he may do to his wife and children

Mangala—Does he care? The toils of a lifetime wasted, the dreams of my youth broken, the hope of my old age turned to ashes, what is the use of my living any more? Let me fall into a well, and finish off this wasted life, and let Ratnam's clever son get a corpse too into the bargain!

Srinivas—Don't get wild God is good, and will somehow save us from utter ruin.

Mangala—What can God do for us? Such as we are, the gods themselves cannot help us. Will Ratnam & Co at least allow us to continue in the house for our days free of rent?

Srinivas—I proposed this to them, but they were adamant, and wanted delivery at once In fact, I expect them now. (*A knock is heard at the door*). I expect it is they Go and open the door, and see if you can persuade them where I have failed (*Mangala goes downstairs to the street door, and opens it and sees Vedaram*)

Vedaram (With tears in his eyes)—Is Srinivas in? I am very sorry to bring this very sad news Vengu is dead!

Mangala—Dead! (*faints Vedaram shouts out "Srinivas!" Srinivas comes and fans Mangala*

Srinivas—What is the matter, Vedaram?

Vedaram—Vengu had an unexpectedly sharp attack early this morning, and succumbed.

Srinivas—Vengu dead! House gone! Sita widowed! Oh, my God! (*Sita comes from the kitchen, on hearing the hubbub*)

Sita—Father, what is the matter?

Mangala (opens her eyes and goes and embraces Sita weepingly).

Sita, my darling girl, your husband is dead. Vengu is dead! *(Sita falls in a heap Vedaram withdraws from the painful scene.)*

Mangala—Why does not this house catch fire and burn us all? Why does not the earth open and swallow us up? *(brings some cold water, and throws it on Sita, and revives her)*

Sita (weeping)—Oh, my husband, you wished me happiness hardly fifteen days ago. And, now, you have left me!

Srinivas (Sobs, and says to Mangala)—This marriage with Vengu was opposed by me even from the outset.

Mangala (weeping)—Oh, why didn't you prevent it? Now, by my folly, I have ruined our Sita's life.

Srinivas—And, by my folly, I have lost our house.

(Enter Ratnam, a man of sixty with a hard and foxy face, with some people Ratnam stops puzzled at the threshold, on seeing the scene there).

Ratnam—Srinivas, we have come for delivery What is all this?

Mangala (steps forward and faces him angrily)—I shall tell you. My daughter Sita's husband, Vengu, is dead. He died this morning Sita is a virgin widow at fifteen, ten months after her marriage.

Ratnam—I am sorry to hear that.

Mangala—Wait Hear the whole story. My husband has embezzled some of your money, and wasted

it on his women. And you, who must have known this all along, and also known that this house has been bought by me with the savings of a lifetime, with the pies saved from sales of cowdung cakes, and pickles, and milk, you have shamelessly taken a sale-deed of this house from him. For you, he slaved night and day From his childhood, he knew no other master Now, your clever son comes from Madras, after passing an examination, and you want to turn us all out into the street in the midst of our overwhelming grief.

Ratnam—We shall come a fortnight hence.

Mangala—No use your coming a fortnight hence. Let me tell you once for all, I will not quit.

Ratnam—Will not quit! I shall make you quit!

Mangala—Oh, will you? You know that I bought the house with my own *stridhan* money [1]

Ratnam—But the house is in your husband's name.

Mangala—I shall set up *benami* [2]. and, by God, you know it is true

Ratnam—It will be difficult to prove it in a court of law

Mangala—We shall see. A law suit will mean great expense and immense delay, let alone the uncertainty. The unsuccessful party is, no doubt, reduced to ashes, but the successful one is reduced at least to charcoal.

1 A woman s separate property.

2 A kind of trust where a person buys in the name of another who is a mere name-lender.

Ratnam—(*Reflects for a moment*) Well, what do you propose?

Mangala—You pay us a hundred rupees down, and give us a paid-up lease of this house for three years In return, we shall give you delivery of this house three years from now, unless we pay up your Rs 2,000 in cash earlier I shall also give you a registered relinquishment deed of my rights over the house

Ratnam—Your terms are much too high.

Mangala—Take them, or leave them. I can't reduce them. My God, can't you see, man, I can't afford to reduce them? I am faced with calamities on all sides. Accept my terms, and earn my everlasting gratitude, or go to court, and see your way to get a decree in your favour and the much more difficult job of successfully executing it.

Ratnam (thinks for a minute)—Why all that bother at this old age, and the curses of you all on the top of it? I accept your terms

Mangala—Thank you (*falls down exhausted*)

Ratnam (amazed)—Oh, why does she fall down like a heap of clothes, she who faced me like a tigress?

Srinivas—She was a tigress for her cubs and home. Now that you have agreed to be generous, the woman in her has prevailed

Ratnam—I am very sorry for you all. Now, I must be going. I shall send the money to-morrow.

Mangala—To me, and not to my husband.

Ratnam—All right (*goes*)

Sita—Oh, father, oh, mother, oh, my God! (*Sobs*)

Mangala, (to Sita)—Come upstairs, dear, and lie down a bit I too want to lie down for an hour or two, and have a good cry. Our world lies shattered around us. We must either go under, or create a new world and a new heaven for ourselves, leaving the old world of Vengus and concubines behind for ever (*She goes upstairs, leading Sita Srinivas follows*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT V

Srinivas's house—A year afterwards. Time 11 a. m. Srinivas and Mangala are in the hall after meals

Srinivas—My dear, did you close last year's accounts? What is the result?

Mangala—We have made a net saving of five hundred and four rupees six annas eight pies.

Srinivas—It is not a bad sum to save It is all due to your industry, courage and guidance

Mangala—That is not so. The savings from my pickle and milk trade are only two hundred and twenty rupees four annas three pies, the other two hundred and eighty four rupees two annas five pies having been earned by you in your vegetable trade.

Srinivas—I am pleased to hear that But, don't forget, my dear, that I shook off my sloth only under your vigilant eye.

Mangala—Travelling round the villages in bullock carts, buying up tamarind and vegetables and cocoanuts at cheap rates, and carting them to the town, and selling them at a profit, are no jobs for a slacker. So, that shows that you too can make good What is more, you have become more steady all round Hullo, there is the postman knocking I wonder what letters we are going to get to-day. *(Srinivas rushes to the street door and comes back with two letters. He looks at their postmarks and then opens and peruses them)*

Mangala—Whom are they from ?

Srinivas—One is from Ranga, and the other from Rajagopal.

Mangala—What does Ranga say ?

Srinivas—That his pay has been raised from thirty to thirty-five rupees per month, and that he hopes to send us five rupees monthly.

Mangala—Good boy ! I shall invest his savings for him, so that, when he marries, he my have all the neeessary vessels bought at once *(Srinivas opens the other letter)*

Mangala—What does Rajagopal say ?

Srinivas (peruses the letter and gets into a rage)—This letter is written to you, as usual. He says that he is looking out for a suitable person to marry Sita What confounded impudence ! Never shall a maiden marry twice,

say our scriptures, and no girl of our house will dream of violating this injunction It is, however, dangerous to put such ideas into the heads of immature girls like Sita. We committed a mistake when we sent her to Rajagopal's house.

Mangala—She has been very happy there. Rajagopal has treated her like his own sister Ganga is also glad of her aid to look after her children

Srinivas—It is perhaps the happy life she leads there, and the looking after the children, that have made her entertain this idea of re-marriage. Rajagopal writes that he has the full moral support of Ganga, and the implied consent of Sita I must go at once and bring Sita here She will be contaminated by such ideas if she continues there, and may succumb to them one day (*Flares up*). Why should he write like this to you? Are you also for this?

Mangala—What is wroug with the re-marriage of a young girl, whose marriage was never consummated?

Srinivas—What! So, you too have joined the camp of these degenerates! Whether the marriage is consummated or not, it is a woman's duty to remain faithful to her husband for life, and never dream of re-marriage.

Mangala—When it is not a man's duty, even when married and living with his wife, to remain faithful to his wife! Oh, how can you reconcile these double standards?

Srinivas—Are you hinting at me?

Mangala—Yes, and at other men. When you people of forty-five and fifty feel the need for additional or alternative mates, how dare you blame a young girl of sixteen, with her whole life before her, desiring a mate?

Srinivas—Women have to observe a higher standard than men. That is so everywhere

Mangala—But, why?

Srinivas—To preserve the purity of the race and to keep the fatherhood certain, else, society will simply go to pieces

Mangala—Even if your argument be granted, it will only apply to married women living with their husbands. How can any confusion of fatherhood arise in the case of widows who re-marry? Why should old widowers be allowed to re-marry a fourth or fifth time, and a young virgin widow be forbidden a mate?

Srinivas—I don't want to argue with you Get this clearly into your head. I shall never allow Sita to marry again

Mangala—How can you prevent it? The laws allow her to re-marry.

Srinivas—Who told you this?

Mangala—Rajagopal. Being a District Munsif[1], he ought to know

Srinivas—So, he has discussed the whole thing with you already?

1 A judicial officer dealing with civil suits.

Mangala—Yes when I went to his house three months ago. He suggested that it was better that Sita married again as she was a girl of tender years I agreed, as I found that Sita too wanted to marry again.

Srinivas—You agreed without consulting me! You married her away before to a decrepit old man, with one foot in the grave, despite all my protests Now, you intend to have her re-married

Mangala—You must pardon me. The second disobedience is necessitated by the first I was wrong in marrying her to Vengu I am right now about this re-marriage.

Srinivas—So you say These admissions cost you nothing The past is gone, and it does not hurt you to admit your mistakes in the past The present is the most important, and you always pretend to be right as regards the present I tell you once for all that if you allow Sita to be re-married, I shall leave the house and never return.

Mangala—Don't desert the ship when it is finding its way to port Stay on, and help me to save the full two thousand rupees to pay off the legacy of debt you have left us Stay on, till we may once more call this house our own.

Srinivas—But, how can I stay on and see the shame of a widowed daughter of mine re-marrying?

Mangala—Is this a great thing for a man who has borne the shame of two decrees and an embezzlement?

Srinivas—But the public consider this to be a far greater shame.

Mangala—So much the worse for the public. What are we to say of a public which regards the honest re-marriage of a virgin widow as a more shameful thing than the immoralities of a married man, or the theft of moneys entrusted to a clerk?

Srinivas—Leave that alone Tell me what you observed in Sita to show that she too desires to marry again.

Mangala—She was beautifying herself She was kissing Ganga's babies repeatedly She was looking with tear-dimmed eyes longingly when Ganga and Rajagopal were sitting together Once, she told me "Oh, mother, I have not even a child to call my own."

Srinivas—Poor child! But, Mangala, how can we think of having Sita married again, contrary to all usage?

Mangala—Think of Sita, darling Sita, with her whole youth and life before her, and with no hope of joy or happiness. Can you condemn her to a life of utter, hopeless sorrow? Is her life to be one long night till she passes on to the great darkness called death? You love her, though not me. Oh, prove it now by not deserting us *(falls at his feet)*

Srinivas (moved)—Mangala, rise up Why should I care for public opinion when my wife and children do not care for it? Besides, Sita's life will be really miserable as a widow, especially after our death.

Mangala—Even a thousand loving brothers cannot fill up the place of a husband. One's own home and children, these are the greatest treasures that God can give.

Srinivas—All right, I shall not oppose.

Mangala (kisses and embraces him)—You are a loving husband and father.

Srinivas—Mangala, don't you think it will be very difficult to find a suitable man to marry Sita ?

Mangala—Yes, but now that the greatest obstacle, your opposition, has been overcome, I am sanguine of securing a suitable boy within a year with the help of Rajagopal A year is not too long to wait, but a whole lifetime of waiting, oh heavens, is dreadful to contemplate.

Srinivas—Now I must be going to buy the fifty maunds of tamarind

Mangala—I too must attend to the household work (*Srinivas goes out. Mangala shuts the door and goes in*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT VI

The same hall Srinivas's house Nine months later. Mangala and Rajagopal sitting and talking Rajagopal is a man of 35 with a keen and alert face. Time 9 am

Mangala—Rajagopal, when do you think we shall get a suitable boy for Sita ? What a difficult job it is !

Rajagopal—Few people among us are willing to marry widows when, as now, they have a choice of maidens Where some young men are genuinely willing there is the opposition of parents, or other relatives, and of the caste.

Mangala—But, if they are really for it, why should they care for such opposition?

Rajagopal—It is all very well to say so It is no joke to defy one's caste Those who foregather at our weddings and funerals, and those whom we most want to foregather, are the blood relatives, and not social reformers and others. The man who defies caste denies himself far more than people ordinarily realise All of us crave for sympathy, understanding and appreciation At present, in our country, we get these from our own caste more than from others. This may be a curse, but it is the naked fact

Mangala—Why not we try among widowers?

Rajagopal—These widowers also get a choice of maidens

Mangala—But there must surely be some men ready to marry an accomplished widow.

Rajagopal—Yes, there must be a few The difficulty is to find them out

Mangala—Why not advertise in the papers?

Rajagopal—I have tried that. But the kind of person who answers such advertisements in a paper is not of a desirable type I got only five replies One was from a man of 34 who suggested that he would marry her as second wife though he had a wife and five children. Of course, there was no question of accepting him. Another was from a man whose reply showed him to be a lunatic, for he said therein, "I want to marry all the widows of India."

Mangala—What a horrible man!

Rajagopal—He is a lunatic The third was from a leper. The next was on behalf of a deaf and dumb idiot. The last was from a pauper who wanted his train fare to be sent in advance if he were to come and marry her And there has been no sixth offer

Mangala—So, we have merely got it bruited abroad that Sita is going to remarry. What shall we do?

Rajagopal—Try, try again I shall never rest till I have found a suitable man for her. We shall have to lower the qualifications of the would-be bridegroom. Instead of the outside limit of 35, we must make it 40. For a property of at least Rs 3,000 or an income of hundred rupees per month, we must substitute Rs. 2,000 and Rs. 60

Mangala—Let us not make any change in the property qualifications I am not for lowering them.

Rajagopal—All right. Only, it will make our job a bit more difficult

Mangala—Better have difficulties at the outset, than meet with them later

Rajagopal—The day before yesterday, Vedaram took a copy of Sita's photo from me to show it to a young friend of his He has not turned up later

Mangala (Smiles)—I see That explains it.

Rajagopal—What explains what?

Mangala—Yesterday morning, Sita told me that when she went to bathe in the Sivapuram tank Vedaram

pointed her out to a strange young man Between ourselves, Sita seems to have guessed Vedaram's intention. She also seems to like the young man But, here she is

(Enter Sita after a bath).

Rajagopal (To Mangala)—I am expecting some letters *(goes to the street door, and then returns hastily)* The postman is not in sight But, father-in-law is coming home with Vedaram and another. Can it be the young man you mentioned just now?

Mangala (darts to the door, looks into the street, and returns hastily back) It is evidently he He has perhaps come to seek the hand of Sita *(Sita blushes)* He is not a bad sort He will be below 30, and is quite handsome. *(Sita blushes again)* Sita, go and change your saree, comb your hair, and tidy up in general We shall call you later if required *(Sita goes into the kitchen Enter Vedaram Srinivas and Achyuth. They and Rajagopal sit on two grass mats in the hall Mangala stands at a short distance)*

Srinivas—Mangala, this gentleman is Mr Achyuth, Vedaram's friend and old student He is from Jayamangalam and comes of a respectable family He is now employed in an oil company in Iraq, and gets two hundred rupees per month He was seven years in Iraq and thought it high time that he married and settled down So, he has taken eight months' leave He has already spent seven months of his leave He wants to marry Sita.

Achyuth (To Srinivas)—Is your daughter at home?

Srinivas—Yes *(calls out)* Sita, come here. Come, don't be shy. *(Sita comes. She has changed into a beautiful red Benares*

silk saree, and has put on a crimson mark on her forehead, and some fresh jasmine flowers in her hair which also has been combed afresh She looks now doubly attractive She comes and stands close to her mother, and a few feet away from the group, with just a suggestion of a smile playing about her lips and a coy expression on her face. Achyuth looks at her with evident joy She returns his gaze, and their eyes meet Mangala and Rajagopal exchange glances)

Achyuth. (to Srinivas)—Sir, Sita is just the kind of bride I have been looking for *(Sita blushes)* I don't mind waiting for some days for your decision If necessary, I shall even cable and get an extension of leave for a month or two

Mangala—Are there any of our people over there ?

Achyuth—There are six Indian families near where I live, two Bengalees, one Sindhi, one Mahratti, and two Muslims from upper India There are excellent boat services now between Iraq and India I can come away on leave for three months once every three years

Mangala—A long interval, and, meantime, the solitude and loneliness of Iraq, an alien society, and the feeling of being away from home and kindred I wonder whether Sita will like it.

Achyuth—That is for her to say. For my part, I shall not feel the least loneliness in Iraq, if Sita were to be with me.

Sita—Mother, I don't mind going to Iraq. Why, Lalita and her husband are in England now,

(Achyuth breaks into a smile of pure joy. Sita goes inside the kitchen followed by her father, mother and brother-in-law, leaving the other two in the hall).

Sita—Mother dear, forgive me You talk of the solitude of Iraq But think of what my solitude will be as a young widow here. The nearness of home and kindred will only intensify my desolation I am not afraid of going to Iraq or any other country as the wife of a man who loves me, but I dread to live in our own village as a widow And I feel that he loves me and will treat me well.

Rajagopal—She is perfectly right.

Srinivas (To Sita)—My blessings, child You have a right to decide, and you have done it I cannot say that you have decided wrong

Mangala—My blessings too, child After all, it is you who must decide, and you have decided.

(Srinivas, Mangala and Sita return to the hall and join the other two who are waiting in anxious silence).

Srinivas (to Achyuth)—Achyuth, we shall be happy to give Sita in marriage to you

Achyuth—I am the happiest man in the world now. (*To Sita*) I have brought this small ring for you *(takes out a gold ring set with a beautiful sapphire, and hands it over to Sita. Sita hesitates, but, on a nod from Mangala, puts the ring on her left ring finger It fits her to a nicety)*

Rajagopal (To Achyuth)—So, you knew even beforehand that she would accept you ?

Achyuth—I was not without hopes

Rajagopal—How well it fits her! How did you get the correct size?

Achyuth—With the aid of an eye sharpened by love (*To Vedaram*) Vedaram, the debt I owe you is inestimable.

Vedaram—I am glad both for you and Sita My heart rejoices at this moment as it has never done for years past When shall we have the wedding, Srinivas?

Srinivas—At the very next *muhoortham* [1] Auspicious events are always to be celebrated on the nearest suitable occasion.

Achyuth—I must write about the joyful tidings to my only relative He is in Bombay Where shall we have the marriage celebrated? May I suggest Bombay?

Srinivas—Oh, that will suit us excellently

Achyuth—Well, let me see To-day is the 10th. There is an excellent *muhoortham* on the 25th Shall we have it that day?

Srinivas—Yes. So, you have already looked up the *muhoortham*?

Achyuth—A man with his leave running out has to be fully prepared. Oh, I cannot express the joy I feel now I must send a wire to Bombay at once I shall come back presently. (*Goes out with Vedaram. Sita clings to Mangala and sobs*)

1 An auspicious hour fixed by astrologers with reference to the stars

Sita—Mother, I prayed to God this morning; and wept as if my heart would break. Evidently, He has heard my prayers.

Mangala—Evidently, He has. Our efforts have been crowned with success.

Sita (recites)

Some days are blue days,
Some days are grey;
Never are two days
Twin days they say

Please, kindly Heaven,
Ere we grow old,
May we be given
One day of gold.

Wonderful day,
So golden and fair,
When Life's first love song
Thrills through the air.

Good times go by,
But their memories stay,
No one can steal it,
My wonderful day.

(CURTAIN)

THE END.

IN THE CLUTCH OF THE DEVIL

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

"There is One alone unchanging
From Whose Presence all devils flee:
He's Sole Lord of all things changing,
And quickly stops the devils' glee!"

PREFACE

This drama depicts what happens now and then in the villages of Malabar in particular and South India in general. These horrible ceremonies are generally, when performed by people of the higher castes, the result of the momentary suppression of their higher culture by their lower The actual persons who officiate at such ceremonies are ignorant low-caste people whose sole occupation it is. These people, as is natural in such cases, develop an elaborate ritual calculated to extract money from their dupes As a class, they are a most horrible-looking set of people, and make the images of the devils after their own ideal of ugliness. The higher and lower culture always exist side by side in the same place and even in the same man all over the world, but it can be seen in greatest clearness in India. Here the call of the higher culture is seen in God represented in various forms in the temples and worshipped with fruits, flowers, water and other elevating and inoffensive offerings by devotees when they are in a higher mood. When, however, the baser passions of fear and revenge are roused, these very devotees will seek to satisfy their cravings by making gruesome animal sacrifices to those devils who had been driven to the underworld by the triumphant gods. The devotees know full well that God represented by the gods in the temples, will never consent to be the instrument of revenge, and so resort to the bloodthirsty demons who are always ready to do any kind of evil. The Hindu conquerors of the aborigines momentarily become the slaves of the devils whose priests and ministers are those very aborigines whom they conquered long ago and even now despise. Such is the queer working of Nemesis.

In many a country village in Malabar, when a child or a cow is ill, it is even now customary to offer four annas and a

cock to a devil The choice of the particular devil rests with the offerer and his adviser And there are innumerable devils to choose from It is proverbial that the gods and devils of the Hindus are as susceptible to rise and fall as human beings. In the eternal background there is the One Unknown Who is the Creator and Sustainer of all the countless universes, Who is both static and dynamic, Who is Being and Non-Being, Who is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity, Patience, Bliss, and Who is in and around us and is thus one with us. In the foreground are the countless gods and devils who change constantly. Old gods yield place to new only at long intervals, and, then too, they take respectable back-seats The old devils have to give place to new devils more rapidly, and several old and powerful devils are not given even back-seats, being completely forgotten, even though, but a few centuries ago, they were in the front rank of the devils. Such a forgotten one is Tantukachcha whose greatness among devils was acknowledged by no less a person than Chanakya. So also, Kuttichathan, who is now the king of the devils in Malabar, got his present position only quite recently. He seems to be a devil borrowed from the West, and seems to be really the Indianised Satan. But he has been now thoroughly acclimatised, if he was ever borrowed, and is addressed by many typically Indian epithets. The affectionate epithet '*kutti*' (child) shows how dear he is to the wizards of Malabar. The other devils mentioned in the drama are at present satellites of Kuttichathan, but were formerly themselves independent and powerful devils.

For many thousands of years, people throughout the world have believed in wizards and witches with evil powers. Like a nightmare, belief in witchcraft has oppressed mankind for millenniums. Ancient Egypt, Sumeria, Chaldea, Babylon, China, India, Greece, and Rome had all laws to punish

wizards and witches who did such horrible acts. Over 300,000 people were done to death in Europe for suspected acts of sorcery, and 100,000 in Germany alone. Frequent references to witchcraft can be found in all scriptures, and even as late as 1788 London ministers were trying to cast the devil out of a boy suffering from epilepsy! Acts ranging from "evil eye" to death by sorcery, were attributed to these agents of the devil who were often considered to be incarnations of devils, and capable of assuming the form of animals (the widespread belief in were-wolves shows this), flying through the air, or walking on fire, and often claimed such powers and used skulls of dead babes and other lugubrious symbols to impress on ignorant people their eerie powers. In India, wizards were more prominent than witches, as became a patriarchal society where women did not move about freely, and they were a regular tribe of charlatans with a few psychiatrists also among them. Even now in Malabar there are some well-known wizards who are fast calling themselves *vaidyas* or doctors!

Such horrible ceremonies, as depicted in this drama, are fortunately becoming rarer with the spread of education. Always there has been bitter opposition to the performance of such ceremonies in respectable localities, even though the performers themselves might be high-caste Hindus. The opposition is now more formidable than ever, and the days of these ceremonies are numbered.

A. S. P. AYYAR.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MALES

1. **Raghuram**—A stamp-vendor of Perunkulam.
2. **Gopal**—Brother of Raghuram. An M.A., and a School-master.
3. **Ram**—A neighbour of Raghuram and a man of no occupation.
4. **Sankar**—
5. **Govind**—
6. **Ishwar**— } Moneylenders.
7. **Narayana**—A philosophical villager.
8. **Trivikrama**—A school-boy.
9. **Krishna**—The oldest villager and virtual head of the village.
10. **Nagan**—
11. **Kelu**—
12. **Chathan**—
13. **Karuppan**— } Wizards and Devil-Dancers.
14. **Appasami**—The village priest.
15. **Kesav**—The brother of Meenakshi.
16. **Chami Panikkar**—An astrologer.
17. **Veeraraghava**—A necromancer.
18. **Brahmadattan Nambudiri**—The priest in charge of the devil-possessed people going to Ettumanur.
19. **Appu Ayyar**—A hotel keeper.

FEMALES

1. **Meenakshi**—Wife of Raghuram.
2. **Janaki**—Wife of Gopal.
3. **Ammu**—Wife of Ram.
4. **Lakshmi**—Another neighbour of Meenakshi.
5. **Muthu**—
6. **Seshi**—
7. **Rukmani**— } Old women of the Village.
8. **Devaki**—A maid servant
9. **Kunchi**—Chami Pannikkar's wife.
10. **Bhagirathi**—Wife of Kesav.

IN THE CLUTCH OF THE DEVIL

ACT I SCENE I

A room in Raghuram's house in Perunkulam village. Raghuram's wife, Meenakshi, a woman of 30 with a sad but fanatical look, is engaged in cleaning some gram bought from the grocer She is talking to Lakshmi, a widow aged 50 Time Midday

Meenakshi—Which fool was it who said that joys and sorrows alternate in life? I have had only continuous sorrow Janaki's life is one round of joys of various kinds Her husband is a prosperous school-master drawing Rs 100 a month, and she has got a nice house of her own. My husband was none too prosperous at any time, and has recently lost even his miserable job of stamp-vendor owing to that hell-dog of a post-master who has greedily usurped that post himself This small house too we owe to the contemptuous generosity of Janaki's husband. All her children are alive! Both my children, Sivam and Chellappan, the apples of my eyes, grew up splendidly till they reached the age of six, and then suddenly contracted a strange disease of the eyes and died. (*Weeps*)

Lakshmi—Don't weep. What is past is past Why don't you open the window fully? How can you pick stones from the gram in this darkness?

Meenakshi—Now I can fancy Chellappan sleeping in his corner, but if I let in too much light this is impossible.

Lakshmi—My dear, if you pine so much about the dead, you will be hastening your own death

Meenakshi—The very thing I want Why keep the cage after the birds have gone?

Lakshmi—But you have still your husband to look after

Meenakshi—He too is sorely afflicted Were it not for him, I would have committed suicide long ago

Lakshmi—Don't talk of suicide Bereft of my husband at the age of twenty-two, abandoned by my two sons whom I had brought up so tenderly, wallowing in abject poverty for the last fifteen years, living on the proceeds of beggary, I have never thought of suicide. Why? Because it is my firm belief that, provided one waits long enough, the tide is sure to turn for the better.

Meenakshi—I am not so sure of it.

Lakshmi—A good lot you have seen of the world! Wait till you get my experience, and then you will agree with my views.

Meenakshi—Lakshmi, I have been racking my head, for long, to find out the hidden cause of the death of my two children. There must be something behind it all.

Lakshmi—I should think that the deaths were due to some horrible rites performed by some enemy who desired these deaths.

Meenakshi—Very very possible Do you think that an astrologer can find out who this hidden enemy is ?

Lakshmi—Of course, he can, provided he is an able man like Chami Panikkar.

Meenakshi—Can he do this ? I didn't know this before Why didn't you tell me ?

Lakshmi—Because you never asked me.

Meenakshi—Do you believe that Janaki would have performed these rites ? She was once saying that my children were so much healthier than hers And, oh her voice was ever so envious ?

Lakshmi—I can't say anything now, my dear. Wait till we consult the astrologer

Meenakshi—When can he be had ?

Lakshmi—Why, tomorrow if you like. But he demands a high fee

Meenakshi—How much ?

Lakshmi—Not less than five rupees.

Meenakshi—That is not too high a price to be paid for this information. Please go to Chami Panikkar to-day itself and ask him to turn up here to-morrow at 7 A M.

Lakshmi—I shall (*Exit Lakshmi*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT I SCENE 2

[*The same day, 4 p. m. A thatched hut. Chami Panikkar seated on a mat in the verandah, and Kunchi standing near him*],

Kunchi—What shall I cook for the night? There is nothing in the house

Chami—There is nothing in the purse also. Till I get some work we shall have only rice gruel Go, buy a measure of rice on credit, and prepare it. We must somehow satisfy the belly.

Kunchi—What curry shall we have?

Chami—Make a nice curry from the spinach in the back-yard.

Kunchi—Alas, a goat ate it all up this morning before our daughter could drive it away.

Chami—What confounded ill-luck! I feel as if I could eat up that goat.

Kunchi—So do we. But the goat belongs to the money-lender next door who will soon hail us all to prison if we do so

Chami—Why should he allow his goat to eat our spinach?

Kunchi—When our daughter went and protested to him, he referred us to the law-courts, and sneered at your not being able to predict the catastrophe

Chami—Hang the fellow! It is surprising how insolent rich men are becoming in these days of lawyers and writs.

Kunchi—When were not rich men insolent?

Chami—That is so. Is not the whole history of the world one long monotonous record of the bullying of the poor by the rich? Money is a greater devil than any we deal with!

Kunchi—If we become rich, I suppose we shall also become bullies.

Chami—That contingency will never occur, my dear.

Kunchi—Who is this coming here? Is it not Lakshmi? What may be her mission?

Chami—So far as I can predict, it is to beg for some money or at least some vegetables

Kunchi—She is a poor widow. Why do you sneer at her?

Chami—I don't sneer at her. I am merely stating the fact.

Kunchi—Well, keep quiet now She is almost at our gates I shall meet her there (*goes to the gate*). Hullo, Lakshmi, how are you getting on?

Lakshmi—I want to speak to Chami Panikkar on some business.

Kunchi—*(aside)* What will my husband gain by the consultation of this woman who is poor as a church

mouse? (*Aloud*) Madam, you are perhaps unaware that my husband never gives consultations without fees.

Lakshmi—I know it very well. It is not on my own account that I have come but on behalf of—

Kunchi—Come in, come in, why do you stand at the gate?

(Chami also goes running to the gate)

Chami—Come in, Madam, walk into our humble dwelling. It is a long time since we have seen you,

Lakshmi—Astrologer, you must come to Perunkulam at 7 a m tomorrow

Chami—You know that I never accept less than ten rupees?

Lakshmi—I shall give you four rupees and not a pie more The lady who wants to consult you will pay you five rupees, but I want you to give me one rupee for my trouble.

Chami—What! Who will come for five rupees! Not Chami Panikkar certainly.

Lakshmi—All right. I shall go to some other astrologer. (*Lakshmi rises to go back*)

Kunchi—Madam, sit down. My husband will come for five rupees, but he will pay no commission.

Lakshmi—Then he will get no work, that is all.

Chami—Well, Madam, take four annas for your trouble and be done with it.

Lakshmi—I shall not take a pie less than one rupee. Really, I ought to have insisted on two rupees.

Chami—All right. I shall pay you one rupee. Who is your friend who wants to consult me?

Lakshmi—Meenakshi, wife of Raghuram.

Kunchi—She who lost two children recently?

Lakshmi—The very same

Chami—What does she want to consult me about?

Lakshmi—About the hidden cause of her children's mysterious death

Chami—What is the cause she suspects?

Lakshmi—She thinks that Janaki, her sister-in-law, has brought about the deaths by some horrible incantations.

Chami—I see I shall be at Raghuram's house at 7 a.m tomorrow.

(Exit Lakshmi.)

Kunchi—*(To Chami)* What is the cause of the deaths but Fate and God?

Chami—True, but such reasons will never satisfy these people

Kunchi—You are not going to predict that Janaki and Gopal are the cause of the deaths?

Chami—I have to.

Kunchi—But it will be cruel to rouse unjust suspicions against innocent people.

Chami—I can't help it Besides, the suspicions have already been roused without my aid

Kunchi—Still, you should not confirm such unjust suspicions

Chami—Dearest, the path of virtue is not the path of success We must live You can't have it both ways Either agree to starve the children and ourselves, or still your scruples.

Kunchi—Do as you like

Chami—Well, then, I shall do as I said Come, let us go in. There is now hope for the morrow

(CURTAIN)

ACT I, SCENE 3

[*The next day at 7 a m Outside Raghuram's house. Meenakshi and Lakshmi standing.*]

Meenakshi—Why has not the astrologer come yet? My husband is all impatience.

Lakshmi—He is sure to come soon He is a man who keeps his engagements.

Meenakshi—Oh, somebody is coming this way. Is it the astrologer?

Lakshmi—Yes, it is he.

Meenakshi—I must tell my husband. *(calls out)* "The astrologer is coming! The astrologer is coming!"

Raghuram—(from within) Where is he? *(gets up and goes to the street while Meenakshi goes inside the house)*

Raghuram—Oh, yes, this is indeed Chami Panikkar *(to Chami)* How are you getting on?

Chami—Nothing much to complain How are you?

Raghuram—You know my state after the death of my two children.

Chami—(aside) Always the two children! The couple has gone mad. *(aloud)* Oh yes. I forgot.

Raghuram—It is easy enough for you to forget, but not so for me.

Chami—Lakshmi said that you wanted to consult me about something

Raghuram—I want you to find out the secret cause of the two deaths

Chami—Shall I sit on the verandah?

Raghuram—Yes, do. Here is my horoscope *(gives it Chami sits on the verandah and spreads his cowries in the approved fashion with great deliberation)*

Chami—(with an air of deep meditation) Saturn is in the ascendant, Jupiter is down and out, the position of Mars is far from satisfactory. *(Meenakshi also comes out and stands at the door leading to the inner apartments)*

Meenakshi—What, you say that Saturn is in the ascendant, isn't it? I always told my husband so

Raghuram—Astrologer, how long has Saturn been in the ascendant?

Chami—For the last 18 months.

Meenakshi—Ever since the day when poor Sivam became ill!

Chami—Yes Saturn was made to prevail over Jupiter by most horrible incantations by two of your concealed enemies.

Raghuram and Meenakshi—*(both together)* Ah!! Who are the villains?

Chami—The teeth bite the tongue

Raghuram—What do you mean?

Chami—Those who ought to aid you are bringing about your ruin

Raghuram and Meenakshi—*(together)* Who are they? Name them quick

Chami—I dare not.

Raghuram—Name them!

Chami—You won't be angry with me?

Raghuram—No. Why should we quarrel with you for telling us the truth?

Chami—Well, then, I shall tell you, but, please, keep the information to yourself. The perpetrators of this most heinous incantation, the secret movers in the death of your two children, are your own brother Gopal and his wife Janaki.

Meenakshi—Even as I thought! May God curse Janaki, and kill all her children!

Chami—Madam, don't curse so.

Meenakshi—I will. My heart is burning, Astrologer, through which devil were the deaths of my children brought about?

Chami—Through the great devil Kuttichathan and his three lieutenants, Chankilikaruppan, Madan and Katteri, who were all won over by bloody sacrifices and incantations Many copper plates were buried in different parts of your house

Meenakshi and Raghuram—Where?

Chami—Wizards can tell you. They can also remove them and perform equally effective and even stronger rites against your enemies

Raghuram and Meenakshi— (*together*) Who are the wizards you recommend for consultation?

Chami—Nagan, Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan.

Raghuram—Which of them is the best?

Chami—All four will have to be called. Nagan is, of course, their leader.

Raghuram—What will be the expenses of the whole ceremony?

Chami—I can't say. You must ask Nagan You know his house, don't you?

Raghuram—Yes.

Chami—Well, I must be going now. Please pay me my fee of five rupees.

Raghuram—Astrologer, take four rupees and be content

Chami—I can't.

Raghuram—Accept four and a half rupees. We are poor

Chami—Well, I shall accept it if Lakshmi will ask me to accept it.

Meenakshi—I shall go and call Lakshmi.

(*Goes out and comes back with Lakshmi*)

Lakshmi—Astrologer, accept it.

Raghuram—Here it is (*gives it*)

Chami—(*tying the money in a corner of his loin cloth*), Thank you. Good-bye to all.

(*Exit.*)

Meenakshi—Well, now, we must look after this other work

Lakshmi—What work?

Meenakshi—Calling the wizards Nagan, Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan.

Lakshmi—Shall I call them?

Meenakshi—No, my husband will call them

Lakshmi—Then I shall go.

Meenakshi—Yes.

(*Exit Lakshmi*).

Meenakshi—(to her husband) Dearest, go at once and call Nagan and ascertain from him all about the ceremonies and their approximate cost.

Raghuram—I shall. *(Exit Raghuram)*

Meenakshi—(to herself) I feel some relief at last after 18 months If everything goes well, I shall have my revenge, and a glorious revenge it will be. *(Shuts the door and goes in)*

(CURTAIN)

ACT I, SCENE 4

[*In the waste land adjoining a lonely tank The same day at noon. Enter Raghuram walking*].

Raghuram—(to himself) Few people care to come to this devil-haunted waste They say that devils abound here like mosquitoes in a swamp. Well, what have I to fear? It is broad day-light Devils do not roam about on land now Of course, some of them may come out of the tank between 1 and 2 p. m, but I shall be back in my house before then Ah, here are the four huts surrounded by all kinds of magic thorns and herbs. I shall not enter this dangerous enclosure by myself. I shall call out Nagan. *(Calls out " Naga ! Naga ! " Naga comes out of his hut)*

Nagan—Who is calling?

Raghuram—I, Raghuram, of Perunkulam.

Nagan—Good morning, what is it you want?

Raghuram—I want some incantations to be done in my house to counteract some ghastly rites performed against me by my brother and sister-in-law on account of which my children died.

Nagan—(to himself) it must be the case told me just now by Chami Panikkar This alliance of astrologers and wizards is proving most useful *(Aloud)* How did you come to know of it?

Raghuram—Through Chami Panikkar.

Nagan—(aside) Who knew it from that worthy woman Lakshmi *(Aloud)* Chami Panikkar is a profound astrologer But even he, was he able to tell you about the positions of the copper plates secreted in different parts of your house?

Raghuram—No, but he told me that you can do it.

Nagan—Of course, I can. The great devil Kuttichathan is at my beck and call. He will show me at once where the copper plates are hidden

Raghuram—How do you master the King of Devils, Kuttichathan?

Nagan—Ah, it is not learnt in a day. Thirty-five years of experience have made me what I am The devil Kuttichathan is very exacting You have to please him by all kinds of offerings and prayers Now it is buffalo's blood that he wants, now it is a young kid, often, he wants you to wait for him for hours, waist-deep in water, in some lonely river, on a dark night; often, he will not appear unless you dance in a cremation ground on a dark

mid- night, with a garland of children's bones round your neck Well, now, to business. When do you want us to come?

Raghuram—Are Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan also here?

Nagan—Yes, they are *(calls out)* Kelu, Chathan, Karuppan! *(Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan come rushing from their huts)*

Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan—Here we are, Nagan. Why did you call us?

Nagan—I want to introduce you to our patron, Raghuram of Perunkulam

Raghuram—(aside) What a ghastly crew these are! Such a villainous-looking set of people I never saw.

(Aloud) Hullo, sirs, how are you all?

Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan—As well as can be expected of the devotees of the King of Devils, Kuttichathan. You know that he is envious of the over-prosperity of his clients and never allows them to have anything but the bare means of subsistence.

Raghuram—What a devil!

Nagan—Don't say so. All of us four have to thank Kuttichathan for the many services he has done us. Come, comrades, let us sing his praises.

Nagan, Kelu, Chathan, and Karuppan—(all sing)

Great is Kuttichathan, King of Devils,
None can equal him for doing evils,

Strong spirits and buffalo's blood he drinks
And from no act diabolical shrinks

God he defies with all his heart and might,
And always keeps himself away from right.
Madan, Changilikaruppan, Katteri,
These are his boon companions merry

Tamarind's tiny branch is his pet throne,
His garlands are e'r made of children's bone.
Friends he receives only at dead of night
When all honest beings are out of sight

Long live Kuttichathan, the foe of God,
May he for ever be our only lord !

Raghuram—(aside) What a horrible song ! Whatever is this ! Are they going to dance too ? *(Nagan and his three comrades do a bit of devil dancing)*

(Aside)—It is getting on to 1 p m *(aloud)* I say, Nagan, it is getting late for me Tell me at once what ceremonies are necessary, and what the expenses will be.

Nagan—On the first day we shall make four figures each of the four devils, offer them animal sacrifices, and take out all the copper plates secreted in your house. Each one of us will have to be paid five rupees with five rupees extra for me. This comes to Rs, 25. The libation of liquor for the four devils will cost twenty-five rupees. Besides this, you will have to get ready some cocks and goats and a buffalo for sacrificing to Kuttichathan.

Raghuram—How bloodthirsty these devils are !

Nagan—What doubt is there? You want your enemy's blood. The devil wants the blood of buffaloes and goats and cocks

Raghuram—I can't allow these animal sacrifices in my house. The village will be wroth against me

Nagan—Devils won't be appeased without animal sacrifices

Raghuram—Cocks may just be tolerated, and perhaps a goat, but certainly not a buffalo?

Nagan—I shall then kill the buffalo in my own house and bring its blood in a bottle for the lustration

Raghuram—Yes, that is not a bad idea, but what will be the cost of the buffalo?

Nagan—Twenty-five rupees at the very lowest, The rice, goats etc, will cost you another Rs 25

Raghuram—What a sum!

Nagan—But think of the satisfaction you get!

Raghuram—Well, will all the ceremonies be over with the expense of these hundred rupees?

Nagan—Oh, no! This is only for taking off the evil effects of your enemy's incantations If you wish to do any evil to him in return, you will have to perform a similar ceremony again. Then, at the end of it, you will have to have a graud devil dance which will cost you fifty rupees more, including the cost of liquor, dinners etc.

Raghuram—Fancy me, a Brahmin, allowing meat and liquor to be brought into my house

Nagan—If you want the devil's aid, you must follow the devil's ways.

Raghuram—So the whole ceremony will cost me Rs 250?

Nagan—Not a pie less.

Raghuram—It is a tremendous sum to spend for a poor man like me

Nagan—The devils make all pay equally

Raghuram—I must go and consult my wife.

Nagan—Do And let me know your decision soon. Remember that if you don't perform this ceremony, no child born to you will live, and your enemy will triumph. Besides, the devils will be wroth with you for dropping the idea of offering them sacrifices after once having thought of doing so

Raghuram—Well, I shall go and consult my wife and let you know my final decision before this evening.

Nagan—Do. *(Exit Raghuram)*

Nagan—(to his three comrades) Let us go and take our meals. This man will surely engage us He puts revenge above right, and, so, is the devil's man.

(CURTAIN)

ACT 1. SCENE 5.

[*The same day at 2 p m.*

Scene—Raghuram's house—Raghuram and Meenakshi engaged in conversation].

Raghuram—Dearest, it costs Rs. 250, in all, and we have not got even ten rupees in cash. We simply cannot afford to have these ceremonies which are, besides, revolting to me

Meenakshi—My husband, are two hundred and fifty rupees dearer to you than our two children ?

Raghuram—Not at all. If we could get back our children, I shall gladly pay Rs 250, and more, but I think it is too high a price to pay for merely warding off further evils

Meenakshi—If we have these ceremonies done, our future children will survive; otherwise, they too will die like the rest.

Raghuram—But how are we to get Rs 250 ?

Meenakshi—By raising a loan

Ragharam—Who will give us a loan of Rs. 250 ?

Meenakshi—Sankar or Govind or Iswar.

Raghuram—On what security ?

Meenakshi—The security of our vessels or house or jewels. Borrow Rs. 100, at first and get the first ceremony performed. If any copper plates are discovered,

we shall know that the incantations work, and shall continue them Otherwise, we shall stop them.

Raghuram—A good idea Shall we have the animals slaughtered here, or shall we ask them to bring bottles of blood in all the cases?

Meenakshi—Bottles of blood will not be as potent in pleasing the devils as the actual sacrifices So let the cocks and goats be sacrificed here. The buffalo's blood alone may be brought in a bottle Go, and tell Nagan at once.

(Exit Raghuram).

Meenakshi—To-day is our turn at the temple. We have refused Siva his offerings in order to give the devils. Well, it is Siva's own fault in not preventing the massacre of our children by Raghuram through the devils.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II, SCENE I

[*The next day at 8 a m*

Sankar's house—Sankar sitting with his Clerk at a table with account books and papers]

Sankar—The days of money-lenders are over Times have changed, and money-lending has become an onerous occupation. Whatever we do is condemned as usury. And what is usury now? All interest above 15%!

Clerk—Not only that, Sir. Formerly, the moment a jewel was pledged with us, it practically became ours for ever. Not so now. We are to make a formal demand, then have a regular auction, and what not Whoever heard of an auction before? The creditor took the jewel, and there was nothing more said about it. Now this Pawn-Brokers' Act has come!

(Raghuram enters)

Sankar—Hullo, Raghuram, why did you make default with regard to your turn in the temple yesterday?

Raghuram—Lack of funds made me do so

Sankar—You could have borrowed from me, young man.

Raghuram—I have come to-day to borrow Rs. 100 from you

Sankar—Ho! Rs. 100 is a pretty big sum for a man like you to borrow Why do you want such a huge amount?

Raghuram—To counteract the effect of the incantations got performed by my brother and sister-in-law as a result of which my two children died

Sankar—Your brother and sister-in-law? Fancy such an educated man like Gopal doing so heinous an act!

Raghuram—That is the worst of it

Sankar—On what security do you want the loan?

Raghuram—On the security of my copper, brass and bronze vessels.

Sankar—Have you got many vessels ?

Raghuram—I have vessels worth at least Rs. 200. I have kept them ready in a cart near my house.

Sankar—Bring them, let me see them.

(Raghuram runs to bring them)

Sankar—*(to his Clerk)* Look at this fool ! Deluded by humbugs, he is rushing into the arms of devils Well, well, what concern of ours is it ? Let us finish perusing these accounts. *(They peruse the accounts Raghuram comes with a cart)*

Raghuram—Here are the vessels

Sankar—Take them out of the cart so that I may see them *(Raghuram Sankar, the Clerk and the cartman together unload all the vessels and put them on Sankar's verandah)*

Sankar—*(aside)* These are worth at least Rs 200. *(aloud)* Raghuram, are these all the vessels ?

Raghuram—Yes, they are worth at least Rs 200.

Sankar—To the owner,every article of his is valuable.

Raghuram—Why, the metal alone in these will fetch not less than Rs 150. The workmanship will cost at least Rs. 50

Sankar—An owner's estimates are always too high. I estimate all your vessels at Rs. 95 Even this is too liberal a valuation.

Raghuram—Can you buy me such vessels for Rs. 95 ?

Sankar—Don't get angry. The buying price is always twice as high as the selling price

Raghuram—I question it.

Sankar—You may question it. Well, what is the use of wasting our time in useless argument? I am, as a special case, willing to lend you Rs. 100 on the above security at the usual rate of 15% per annum

Raghuram—15%! That is too high a rate People are lending at 9% without security, and at 6% with security.

Sankar—Who are those people? Go to them. Take your vessels and pack off

Raghuram—All right

(*Prepares to go*)

Sankar—Wait I don't want to be too harsh to a fellow-villager I shall be content with 12½% You can't get a more favourable rate in all the country side.

Raghuram—(*aside*) This is true, but I shall bring him down a bit more (*aloud*) I will not pay more than 12% My vessels will induce any man to lend me at 12%.

Sankar—(*aside*) He is right, He is not likely to repay the debt at all, so, the right of foreclosure is a very real thing here For Rs 88 I shall be getting vessels worth Rs. 200. If I let this opportunity go, Govind and Iswar will profit by it (*aloud*) Well, as a very special case, I shall lend you at 12%, but you must tell everybody that you borrowed at 15%.

Raghuram—What if you, later on, urge that the real interest is 15% and cheat me?

Sankar—There is the promissory note which will show the rate of interest in figures and letters What have you to fear?

Raghuram—Why do you want me to give out to others a false rate of interest?

Sankar—Simply to prevent other borrowers from claiming the same concession as yourself.

Raghuram—If that be the case, I promise.

Sankar—Well, now, we must get the document written.

Raghuram—I shall write it myself

Sankar—Excellent Do. (*Raghuram writes*).

Raghuram—The document is complete.

Sankar—Read it.

Raghuram—(*reads*) I, Raghuram, son of Sivaram, of Perinkulam village, hereby promise to pay, on demand or order, Rs. 100 (One hundred rupees only) to Sankar, son of Pichu, of the same village, for value received to-day This sum will bear interest at the rate of 12% per annum. My 21 vessels (described in Schedule A) are hereby pledged to the said Sankar to secure the above debt of Rs. 100 The fullest right of foreclosure is given to the said Sankar .) RAGHURAM.

Sankar—Yes, that is enough. Give the document to me (*takes it.*) Now I shall give you the money.

(*Takes out a hundred rupees*) Here are the hundred rupees borrowed by you from me to-day (*places the money in Raghuram's hand*). Out of this, twelve rupees are to be given back to me as the first year's interest, and one anna for the stamp So, I take twelve rupees and one anna from the sum (*takes this amount*)

Raghuram—Why should I pay interest for the year now? Is not the interest paid at the end of the year?

Sankar—No money-lender will consent to wait till the end of the year Suppose you go bankrupt before the end of the year, am I to lose my interest?

Raghuram—There are my vessels

Sankar—Forsooth, I must take your Rs. 95 worth of vessels in full satisfaction for my Rs. 112! Ha! Ha! No use of unnecessary words, my friend, pay the stipulated interest beforehand, and prove your good faith.

Raghuram—At least forego the one anna.

Sankar—What! Forego the value of the stamp affixed to a document executed by you! Why, man, it would almost seem as if it was I who wanted to lend, and not you to borrow

Raghuram—(*aside*) It is useless to argue with this hard-hearted wretch. I want the money urgently, and can't afford to roam about the country in search of loans. All money-lenders are equally heartless. (*aloud*) All right. I shall now go home. Good-bye

Sankar—Good-bye.

(*Exit Raghuram with Rs. 87-15-0*).

(CURTAIN)

ACT II, SCENE 2

[*The next day, 5 p.m.*

Raghuram's house—Enter Nagan, Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan with Raghuram]

Nagan—Shall we begin our operations?

Raghuram—What do you intend doing to-day?

Nagan—We want to make the images of the four devils, bathe them with buffalo's blood, cock's blood and goat's blood, and then find out the secreted copper plates. (*Enter Ram*).

Ram—What is all this, Raghuram? My wife tells me that you are going to have some goats, cocks and buffaloes sacrificed here, and some devils installed in your house. This is highly improper.

Raghuram—Who told your wife?

Ram—Lakshmi.

Raghuram—That wretch is a general purveyor of all kinds of news.

Ram—Well, what I am concerned about is that, in this Brahmin village, I shall not tolerate devils being installed or animals being sacrificed.

Raghuram—Don't Brahmins also, now and then, sacrifice animals to some devils outside the village, in order to make their children or cows recover from some malady?

Ram—They do, but it is never done in the village itself.

Raghuram—What does it matter? It is only the act that counts, not the place where it is done.

Ram—The place also counts You may spit outside the house, but that is no reason why you should spit inside the house

Raghuram—Invalids spit inside the houses also.

Ram—You are unjustly suspecting your brother and sister-in-law Led on by humbugs and impostors, you are rushing to your ruin I shall not allow devils to be installed and animals sacrificed in my neighbour's house.

Raghuram—This is my own house. I can do what I like here

Ram—You can't You must do as others do.

Raghuram—I won't Do what you like.

Ram—I shall go and tell Krishna.

Raghuram—Do I care a fig for the old fool or his opinions.

(*Exit Ram*).

Raghuram—(*to Nagan*) Go on with your work. Have you brought the buffalo's blood?

Nagan—No. As soon as the images are ready, Kelu will go and fetch the goats and cocks and also the buffalo's blood.

Raghuram—All right, then, let the images be made.

Nagan—Is suitable clay made ready in requisite quantities?

Raghuram—Yes. Who will make the images of each devil?

Nagan—I shall make the four images of Kuttichathan, Kelu those of Madan, Karuppan those of Changili Karuppan, and Chathan those of Katteri. These will be put in four rows facing one another The whole house except the front verandah and the back verandah should be vacated We should be left absolutely alone to make the images and to do the bathing with blood

Raghuram—As you desire, I shall ask my wife to remove all the things to the back verandah (*calls his wife and tells her so*)

(*Enter Meenakshi after a while*)

Meenakshi—The things are all removed

Raghuram—(*to Nagan*) Enter and begin.

Nagan—All right. (*to Kelu, Karuppan and Chathan*). Enter, sirs, and begin Make no mistake.

Chathan—What is to be the height of these images?

Nagan—Kuttichathan 24 inches, Changilikaruppan 22 inches, Madan 20 inches, and Katteri 18 inches. Well, let us begin work briskly. Raghuram, you better go away. Is there a light inside?

Raghuram—Yes.

Nagan—We want to be alone inside the house.

(*Nagan, Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan enter the house and bolt the door Raghuram sits on the front verandah Meenakshi sits on the back verandah*).

Raghuram—(*to himself*) It is an hour since these shut themselves in. Have they not finished moulding their images yet? But, of course, the devils are very difficult to make Sunken eyes, long curved teeth, protruding tongue, feet turned backwards, a ferocious look, all these take a lot of doing. Why is Krishna coming this way? Hang the fellows, why should they concern themselves with my affairs?

(*Enter Krishna, followed by a crowd of villagers*)

Krishna—Raghuram, is it true that you are installing devils in your house and are intending to offer animal sacrifices to them?

Raghuram—Yes.

Krishna—This ancient village of Perinkulam has existed for well-nigh two hundred years, but, in all its annals, not a single person has installed devils in his house or offered animal sacrifices.

Raghuram—How many persons had children killed by incantations before? Necessity is no respecter of custom.

Krishna—Raghuram, there is no necessity in your case.

Raghuram—You are not the judge of my necessity. You are a tyrant in this village preaching the best of doctrines but practising what suits you most

Krishna—I did not come here to be reviled I gave some advice. You are foolish enough to reject it, I shall

go my way. May the devils take you to their bosoms! He who invokes the devil ends by the devil.

(Exit Krishna)

Raghuram—(to the villagers who had assembled). You also may go home.

Narayana—Raghuram, listen. The devils, by their very nature, can do only evil You want them to do evil to your enemies After doing so, they will do evil to you. Don't sacrifice dumb animals to hideous images representing devils.

Raghuram—I don't care for what you say

Narayana—Then I shall go away *(exit with the villagers).*

Raghuram—(to himself) Have not these four finished making the images yet? Ah, the doors open.

(Nagan and Kelu come out)

Raghuram—Have the images been made?

Nagan—Yes, and they look like the real devils they represent Come and have a look

Raghuram—(takes a peep in) What hideous things these images are!

Nagan—The real devils are ten thousand times more hideous. Hey, Kelu.

Kelu—There is no greater authority on devils than Nagan

Raghuram—Do the devils always have protruding tongues, curved teeth and inversely turned toes, like these images?

Nagan—What doubt is there? Is it not from personal knowledge that we make the images?

Raghuram—It is wonderful how devils can walk forward when their feet are turned backward!

Raghuram—When are you going to buy the cocks and goats and bring the buffalo's blood?

Nagan—Kelu will be sent presently, as soon as you favour him with the requisite amount?

Raghuram—What amount should be given to him?

Nagan—Seventy-five rupees, twenty-five for the liquor and cocks, twenty-five for four goats and rice, and twenty-five for the buffalo

Raghuram—I can't pay so much. I have borrowed in all Rs 100 for this purpose, but the devil of a money lender left me only Rs. 87-15-0.

Nagan—He seems to be a cleverer devil than even Kuttichathan

Raghuram—Well, well, what I wanted to say was that I would pay only Rs. 62-15-0 to Kelu instead of the Rs 75, demanded by you I want the remaining Rs 25, for paying your hires.

Kelu—How can four goats be bought for less than Rs 24? How can enough liquor and cocks be bought for less than Rs 25? How can a buffalo be got for under Rs. 25?

Raghuram—I don't care for all these details. I shall give only Rs. 62-15-0. You must buy all these things with that sum.

Nagan—We shall then cut short the number of goats or cocks or the quantity of liquor

Raghuram—Oh, no, that will undermine the efficacy of these ceremonies I cannot see why you cannot buy all the things for Rs 62-15-0 Shall I go and buy them ?

Kelu—(*to Nagan, aside*) The game is up

Nagan—(*aside*) You are quite right, Kelu

I am very much affected by your pathetic offer to go and buy the animals yourself Never shall it be said of me that I sent a Brahmin in quest of buffaloes, goats, cocks and liquor So, give Kelu Rs 62-15-0.

Raghuram—Here is the money (*gives Rs 62-15 0 to Kelu*)

Nagan—Kelu, you may start now

Kelu—I want two more to help me How can I bring four goats, liquor, cocks, rice and buffalo's blood ?

Nagan—True, take Chathan and Karuppan also with you (*Chathan and Karuppan join Kelu*).

Kelu—Now we shall go , take care that the devils do not appear before we come back with the offerings. For, then, they may swallow poor Raghuram, or do some such dreadful thing

Raghuram—Nagan, for God's sake, do no such thing.

Nagan—I shall see to that. Now go (*exeunt Kelu, Chathan and Karuppan*). Raghuram, I must now be in silent communion with the devils (*goes into the house and shuts the door*)

Raghuram—(to himself) I shall go and tell Meenakshi all these things

(CURTAIN)

ACT II, SCENE 3

[*The same day at 8 p m.*

The village temple at Perinkulam—A great crowd is assembled, including Krishna, Ram, Narayana, Appasami, Ammu, Muthu, Seshi, Rukmani etc]

Ram—What scandal is this! In this ancient village of Perinkulam, for the first time, devils are installed in houses Cocks, goats and buffaloes are sacrificed to them, and liquor is offered as libation. Is there no man in the village to put a stop to this iniquity?

Krishna—What can we do? I protested to Raghuram, but all in vain So did Narayana. Times have changed In former days, we could have forcibly put a stop to these devilish performances, thrashed the wizards, and be regarded as public-spirited people who had done their duty Now, however, what with the laws and the lawyers, what with the civil and criminal courts, we would be running a serious risk of imprisonment if we attempted to do these things

Ram—We must devise some way of putting a stop to these iniquities What do you say, Appasami?

Appasami—If we do not, God Siva will desert our temple in disgust. Why not go and drive the devil-dancers out? If Krishna and others come with me, I am ready to take the risk

Krishna—No, no, we will not come, for we may be put up for rioting, and you can imagine what it will be.

(Enter Lakshmi).

Ammu—Lakshmi, what news about Raghuram's infernal ceremonies?

Lakshmi—The devils have been installed, cocks, goats and buffaloes have been sacrificed to them, libations of liquor have been offered, and several secreted copper plates recovered.

Krishna—What, were copper plates recovered?

Lakshmi—Yes, four copper plates were recovered from various parts of the house. Meenakshi called me and showed them to me as soon as they were recovered.

Narayana—How were they?

Lakshmi—They were shining, and had strange hieroglyphic inscriptions on them.

Narayana—How could the copper plates have been shining if really they were buried under the ground by Gopal some months ago?

Lakshmi—That is rather strange.

Narayana—There is nothing strange in it. The devil-dancers must have buried them when they were

making the images behind closed doors. What shall we do to prevent at least the future ceremonies?

Krishna—I do not see anything that we can do. Let us leave it to Siva to punish the devil-worshippers.

Narayana—Siva may not punish in this world.

Krishna—Well, we can't do anything, the laws being what they are.

Ram—What is the use of so many Brahmins being here if they can't prevent this?

Krishna—The days of caste rule are over. Now we are ruled by a common law which gives a man just as much right to worship the devils as gods, and to kill animals as to rear them He who breaks the law will be severely punished, irrespective of his caste

Ram—How can I sleep in my house in peace hereafter, with the devils next door?

Lakshmi—Oh, the shrieks of the goats and cocks were horrible!

Ammu—Were the goats also killed there?

Lakshmi—Yes.

Ammu—And the buffalo?

Lakshmi—Its blood was brought in a bottle They say it is only rabbit's blood.

Narayana—What are the devil-dancers doing now?

Lakshmi—They have departed, after having got themselves drunk with liquor.

Narayana—Did they take the images of the devils with them?

Lakshmi—Oh, no The devils are left in the hall in four rows facing one another. They present a most horrible sight

Krishna—Let us return to our houses after praying to God to rid this village of devils and devil-worshippers. That is all we can do safely

All—(Pray) Oh God, rid our village of devils and devil-worshippers!

(CURTAIN)

ACT II, SCENE 4

[*The next day at 7 a m*

Raghuram's house Raghuram and Meenakshi engaged in conversation]

Meenakshi—Four copper plates were dug out, so the deaths of four people had been planned What a horrible villainess this Janaki was in spite of her outward professions! Now I shall get even with her

Raghuram—All our money is exhausted. How can we get the other two ceremonies performed?

Meenakshi—We must get them performed somehow. What is the use of leaving these ceremonies off at this stage?

Raghuram—The second ceremony alone will cost us Rs 87-15-0, like the present one. Who will lend us this amount, and on what security?

Meenakshi—There is my gold chain worth Rs 160.

Raghuram—But it is your wedding present given by your father

Meenakshi—Yes, it all the more behoves me to spend it for the benefit of our children

Raghuram—Nagan told me that the evil effects of Gopal's incantations were all removed by yesterday's ceremony, and that the other two ceremonies were only necessary if we want to take revenge on Gopal and Janaki by killing their children

Meenakshi—And don't you want to take revenge? Can you watch unmoved the prosperity of the murderess of your two beloved children?

Raghuram—I am not unmoved, but what is the use of killing Gopal's children? After all, they too are children.

Meenakshi—Yes, but they must suffer for their parents' evil. Why do you remain silent?

Raghuram—A shadow has fallen over me, the shadow of the devils. I am not the same man as before Nor do people treat me the same as before. Why, to-day when I went to the tank to clean my teeth and bathe, none of the people would speak to me The very children shrank from me as if I were a moral leper. I called an old acquaintance, and he avoided me like the very devil. Oh, I am plunging into unknown depths of devilry.

Meenakshi—No, you are not Nobody outcasted Gopal and Janaki when they wantonly performed incantations against us. I do not see why they should outcaste us for taking to sorcery in self-defence.

Raghuram—We have done as much as is necessary for self-defence Had we not better stop here, my dear?

Meenakshi—No I cannot remain quiet without some kind of retaliation At least one of Janaki's children must die.

Raghuram—Oh, talk not to me of the death of children The death of our own children is quite enough.

Meenakshi—My heart craves for revenge, and I must have it

Raghuram—The financial liabilities will overwhelm us. I see the beginning of our end

Meenakshi—I don't I see the beginning of our prosperity. Freed from the diabolical effects of our hidden enemies' incantations, we shall hereafter not only rejoice in the sweet revenge we shall take on those enemies, but shall also be blessed with babies which will live long

Raghuram—Meenakshi, do you not think that our house has lost its grace and homeliness by the installation of the devils and the sacrifice of animals?

Meenakshi—It has to some extent But this can be remedied when the ceremonies are all over I shall flood the house with cow-dung water

Raghuram—We cannot hope to live in the village after the ceremonies are all over

Meenakshi—Then we shall go elsewhere and begin a new life, that is all. There is my brother's village where we shall be very happy. Now, take this gold chain and

borrow a hundred rupees from Sankar or Govind or Ishwar *gives Raghuram the jewel)*

Raghuram—(takes it) I shall go to Govind this time. I do not like the idea of going to Sankar again. *(Exit).*

Meenakshi—Now I must attend to my cooking *(goes in)*

(CURTAIN)

ACT II, SCENE 5

[*Three days later.*

Perinkulam—In front of Muthu's house. Muthu and Devaki engaged in conversation Time 3 p m]

Muthu—So Devaki, the whole horrible ceremonies are over, are they?

Devaki—Yes Last night was the red pepper offering and the concluding ceremonies Oh, the red peppers, when thrown into the fire, created such an intolerable smell that none could bear it except the four devil-dancers who were all dead drunk with liquor and gorged with meats of various kinds.

Muthu—On the second and third days also animals were sacrificed, were they?

Devaki—Oh, yes,

Muthu—Where did this meat-eating and drinking take place?

vaki—In the hall where the devils in four rows kept watch.

Muthu—Horrible!

Devaki—Most horrible! Who would have thought that a Brahmin like Raghuram would have done all this? He is now totally ruined He borrowed Rs 87-15-0 from Sankar, pledging vessels worth Rs 200, and borrowed Rs 87-15-0 from Govind pledging a gold chain of Meenakshi, her only considerable jewel, worth Rs. 160. He has finally borrowed Rs. 65-15-0 from Ishwar mortgaging his house and compound worth Rs 150

Muthu—I heard that he borrowed Rs. 100 from Sankar, Rs 100 from Govind and Rs. 75 from Ishwar

Devaki—Those are the paper rates mentioned in the promissory notes and mortgage deeds I mentioned only the sums he actually received.

Muthu—Will he ever be able to repay the amounts?

Devaki—What madness! He will never be able to repay even a pie. The vessels, jewel and house will only go to inflate the three money-lenders' bellies.

Muthu—Are the devils still in the hall?

Devaki—Yes, in four rows facing one another The devil-dancers say that those who remove them from that place will meet with the most horrible misfortunes ever man met. The devils must remain there till they are dissolved slowly by the action of sun, rain and wind.

Muthu—That means till the roof falls in and house is entirely ruined.

Devaki—Yes.

Muthu—It doesn't look as if Ishwar will stand to gain much.

Devaki—Of course, Sankar and Govind will gain more

Muthu—What do Raghuram and Meenakshi intend to do now ?

Devaki—To migrate from this village which has become too hot for them

Muthu—They brought it on their own heads. Where do they intend migrating to ?

Devaki—They have not settled it. Most probably, Meenakshi may go to her brother's house and Raghuram may go wandering about the country in search of a job.

Muthu—What a fate !

(CURTAIN)

ACT III, SCENE I

[*The same day at 4 p m*

Raghuram's house. Raghuram, Meenakshi and Lakshmi in conference].

Raghuram—All our money is gone, almost all our things, including the house, are pledged, and our house is rendered uninhabitable for decent people. We have spent our all on the devils. There is no rice in the house even for this evening's cooking.

Meenakshi—There are my ear ornaments worth Rs 15 or Rs 20. Lakshmi, take them, pledge them with a shop-keeper, and borrow as much as he would be willing to lend Buy five rupees' worth of rice, and sundries for one rupee, and bring the remaining rupees in cash.

Lakshmi—Meenakshi, you yourself must pledge them They will not accept a pledge from me, since it will be legally weak for them If you come, I shall go with you.

Meenakshi—Yes. I shall come at once. (*To Raghuram*) We shall return soon.

(Exeunt Meenakshi and Lakshmi).

Raghuram—(to himself) I have become an inmate of the world of devils My dreams are all about Kuttichathan and his myrmidons I see them drinking all kinds of blood and liquor Yesterday I dreamt that Kuttichathan was sucking my blood. When going away, the King of Devils even pulled my brains out. I don't know what it means. Well, there is no use thinking much about it All thinking worries me now My brain is fatigued. Let me go in.

(CURTAIN)

ACT III, SCENE 2.

[*Two days later. Time 6 p.m.*

Perinkulam—Ishwar's house—Enter Ishwar and Ram].

Ishwar—(agitated) Is it true, Ram? Has the wretch actually pulled down some rafters for using them as firewood after he had mortgaged the house and compound to me for Rs. 75?

Ram—I saw it with my own eyes. He is still at it.

Ishwar—Good God, this is the end of all law, the height of villainy, the depth of deceit. This must be put a stop to Come, we shall run to the house and prevent the iniquitous deed.

Ram—I won t come They are already bitter against me. I shall wait here till you come back (*Ishwar runs to Raghuram's house*)

Ram—(to himself) The greedy money-lender is now in an awkward predicament. (*Sees Ishwar come rushing*) Why is Ishwar coming back at such a terrific speed and with beads of perspiration on his forehead? (*Aloud*) Hullo, Ishwar, whatever is the matter with you, man?

Ishwar—(panting) Why didn't you tell me about the devils? Oh, I rushed into the house in order to enter an emphatic protest, and, in my hurry, stumbled over a horrible image of Kuttichathan in the hall and fell down in a space enclosed by four rows of devils facing one another. The whole place was black with the blood of cocks, goats and buffaloes, and the stench emitted was as foul as anything in hell. And, oh, the look of those sixteen monsters with hideous faces, protruding tongues, curved teeth, and inversely turned toes I felt as if I had a glimpse of hell, and collecting my scattered

nerves, cleared the threshold in two desperate leaps and did not stop till I reached here

Ram—What about the rafters?

Ishwar—Hang the rafters! I must look after my own skin first Money can be earned at any time, but not life. I am sure that those horrible devils would have killed me had I tarried a minute longer

Ram—After all, they are only clay images

Ishwar—Go to that hall as I did You will revise your opinion of them

Ram—I have no desire to go there Look, here is Narayana coming *(Enter Narayana)*

Narayana—Ram, have you heard the news? Raghuram and Meenakshi are leaving this village tomorrow.

Ishwar—How did you learn this?

Narayana—Raghuram himself told me

Ishwar—Where are they going to?

Narayana—Meenakshi is going to her brother's house in Pallanchathanur, and Raghuram is going to wander from place to place in search of a job.

Ishwar—Is he not going to pay up his creditors before he goes?

Narayana—He has nothing to pay with. He thinks of leaving the vessels, jewels, and the house permanently in the hands of his three creditors.

Ishwar—Hm! Who will pay Rs 75, for the devil-ridden house and compound?

Ram—Hundreds. Are you prepared to sell the house and compound to me for Rs. 75? We shall settle the bargain at once in the presence of Narayana.

Ishwar—What about my profit?

Narayana—This is the way with money-lenders!

Ishwar—Think of the immense profits accruing to Sankar and Govind What are my profits compared to theirs? Why, Sankar got Rs. 15, for merely hiring out the pledged vessels for a couple of days for a feast.

Narayana—Is not such lending-out forbidden by law?

Ishwar—Pooh! Which money-lender cares for laws and regulations? He is a law unto himself. Can the poor debtor afford to sue him? Even if he scrapes together the money, where is the evidence for him? But for this, do you think that such a cautious man like Govind would have allowed his wife to wear the gold necklace pledged with him by Raghuram?

Narayana—You money-lenders are a clever lot.

Ishwar—Otherwise, we shall never be able to get on

Narayana—You will be able to get on better if you make your terms more lenient

Ishwar—Oh, no Our capital is too small, and our clients too risky for applying bank rates of interest. I

say, is it not Raghuram coming? Whatever does the man want to do here?

(Enter Raghuram)

Raghuram—Great is Kuttichathan, King of Devils. He sucked my blood, he will do the same with yours

Ishwar—Oh, this wretch has come to put me under the devils' influence Let me rush in (*rushes into the house and bolts the door Raghuram goes frantically to the door, knocks at it violently, and shouts out 'Ishwar, great is Kuttichathan King of Devils He sucked my blood He will presently suck yours'*)

Ishwar—(from within) Oh Narayana, oh Ram, take this horrible man away He is sent by the devil, whom I trod on, in anger. There is no doubt about it. Unless you send him away, he will suck my blood!

Raghuram—That I shall I shall suck your blood dry, and leave nothing but skin, flesh and bones behind.

Ishwar—(from within) Oh! Take all the rafters if you will, but don't suck my blood dry I shall run upstairs and escape your threats (*runs upstairs*).

Narayana—(to Raghuram) What is the matter with you, Raghuram? Are you mad?

Raghuram—Let me suck the blood of Ishwar.

Narayana—The fellow is assuredly mad Come, Ram, take one of his hands, we shall together lead him to his house (*Narayana and Ram together seize Raghuram and forcibly carry him to his house a few yards away*).

Ishwar—(opening the door) (to himself) God be praised! Narayana is, after all, of some use He alone had the courage to do just what was wanted Philosophers have their uses Their concern is with gods and devils so they are not as much afraid of the latter as we are Here come Narayana and Ram. *(Enter Narayana and Ram).*

Ishwar—Has the man been safely stowed in his house?

Narayana—Yes What a coward you are, Ishwar!

Ishwar—You are a philosopher, I am not I care for my skin and blood much more than you do. I must thank you, Narayana, for saving my life to-day.

Narayana—Pooh! Your life was never in danger. He came simply to ask you to take this house and compound in satisfaction for your loan

Ishwar—Who told you?

Narayana—His wife Meenakshi.

Ishwar—I won't be content with the devil ridden house and compound for my Rs. 75. I shall also attach some other articles of his when he goes away to-morrow.

Narayana—(aside) I shall curb his avarice soon. *(aloud to Ishwar)* Then, as sure as anything, he will suck your blood dry

Ishwar—You too think so? Then, I shall never go that way till he leaves the village. After all, my skin is worth more than a few rupees.

Narayana—(aside) How my trick succeeded! *(aloud to Ishwar)* Well, I must be going home now.

Ram—I must also be going

(Exeunt Narayana and Ram).

Ishwar—(to himself) Good fellows these, especially Narayana. Well, I must now go in and bolt the door. Who knows whether this Raghuram may not be sent again by Kuttichathan to drink my blood? And, this time, there will be no Narayana or Ram *(goes in and bolts the door)*

(CURTAIN)

ACT III, SCENE 3

[*Two months later*

Thenur—Gopal's house—10 p m. Enter Gopal and Janaki]

Janaki—(weeping bitterly) Oh, my child, my Sundar, why did you leave us so suddenly? Dearest, it is all the work of the incantation performed by your brother and sister-in-law. Otherwise, why should Sundar fall into the well, in broad day-light, and expire without a single cry for help? We did no evil to Raghuram or Meenakshi. Why should they do evil unto us? Meenakshi openly went about saying that, within three months, at least one of our children would die It is not quite two months since the ceremonies were performed, and one of our children, our dear Sundar, has died. Is there any doubt that the devils are at the bottom of this murder?

Gopal—The devils are not the cause of the death It was God's will to call Sundar home, that was all.

Janaki—Why did God call Sundar home at such a tender age?

Gopal—That is a mystery I cannot unravel All that I can say is that devils and incantations have absolutely no power to do the least evil or good to anybody. Besides, see to what a state Raghuram and Meenakshi have arrived Owing to the ceremonies they performed they are now paupers, with no vessels, no jewels, no home even Why should this happen to them if devils favour their devotees, and heap evil on the enemies of their devotees

Janaki—But it is well-known that devils do only evil, and never any good

Gopal—Take the death of Sivam and Chellappan. Who was responsible for their death, but God? And yet Raghuram and Meenakshi say, and most probably believe, that we caused their deaths by incantations.

Janaki—*(weeping)* What a horrible lie!

Gopal—Such is superstitous humanity. It always prefers to go by its prejudices and preconceived notions. But God knows the truth Don't weep unnecessarily. We must bear the blows of Providence with quiet submission. Come, let us go in. It is cold out here

(CURTAIN)

ACT III, SCENE 4

[*Three days latter*

Pallanchathanur—Verandah of Kesav's house—7 p m Enter Kesav, Bhagirathi and Meenakshi]

Kesav—Raghuram is still wandering about aimlessly from place to place, stark mad, yelling about Kuttichathan and the devils and threatening to drink people's blood.

Bhagirathi—It is the devils which have brought him to this He began with a most unjust suspicion, against his poor brother and sister-in-law

Meenakshi—I too believed like that then, and, shame to say, encouraged him The scoundrellish astrologer and the diabolical devil-dancers led me on in this unjust belief And that hell-hound Lakshmi egged me on. Only now do I know that the whole thing was cleverly stage-managed, that Lakshmi got a clue from my unguarded words, communicated it to Chami Pannikkar who, in his turn, informed the devil-dancers I am now sincerely sorry for what I did. The whole village is laughing at our folly House lost, vessels lost, and, alas, husband lost! The devils have made my poor husband mad. Whenever I hear about his mad wanderings, I feel inclined to commit suicide, for I am the indirect cause of his madness. If the house were mine still, I would have gone there and smashed those devils.

Bhagirathi—No use thinking of that now. You know that Gopal's child Sundar fell into a well and died

three days back. The poor mother blames you and Raghuram.

Meenakshi—Rightly We are the cause of his death by our insensate ceremonies. Let Gopal and Janaki kill us, for we have sinned

Kesav—Gopal never attributes the death to you

Meenakshi—He is an angel. Long before Sundar's death I had repented of my deeds and had prayed to God to undo the effects of the diabolical ceremonies. But the devils, of their own accord, murdered that poor child I must, however, meet Janaki one of these days and beg her pardon Bhagirathi, I owe you an immense debt. You made me repent by your correct delineation of the character of Gopal and Janaki, and your emphatic condemnation of the resort to astrologers, devil—dancers and other humbugs Would to God that Sundar had not died! I feel his death as keenly as I do Sivam's or Chellappan's Oh, I am a wretch, an abandoned wretch.

Kesav—Meenakshi, here is your husband coming *(Meenakshi hastily rises up agitated)*

(Enter Raghuram),

Raghuram—(with joy) Gopal's child, Sundar, is dead! Great is Kuttichathan, King of Devils! Sundar is dead! The incantations are working I came to tell you this Great is Kuttichathan, King of Devils!

Meenakshi—Oh God, save my husband from the devils which have possessed him.

Raghuram—Your God can do nothing against my devils My devils brought about Sundar's death, not God.

Meenakshi—*(shutting Raghuram's mouth with her hands)* Don't say such horrible things. Don't rejoice at poor Sundar's death.

Raghuram—*(struggling to free his mouth, and finally succeeding in the attempt)* I shall drink your blood, beware. I am Kuttichathan, I am Chankilikaruppan, I am Madan, I am Katteri

Bhagirathi—The man is in the clutch of the devil. He is tryng to run away Secure him, dearest

Kesav—*(catching firm hold of Raghuram)* What is the matter with you, Raghuram ? Don't you know me ?

Raghuram—Are you Kollikkattai ?

Kesav—Good Heavens, no I am Kesav, your brother-in-law.

Raghuram—My brother-in-law ? I have no brother-in-law Set me free. My only concern is with Kuttichathan, Chankilikaruppan, Madan and Katteri. Four rows of four each, sixteen in all dripping with the blood of cocks, goats, buffaloes and Sundar ! Set me free *(Struggles)*

Meenakshi—I am your wife, Don't you know me ?

Raghuram—*(looks at her)* Ah, yes, you are my wife. To be sure, you are my wife You are in the back verandah, and I am in the front verandah. Sixteen devils are in between us. I must go now The devils call me. Ha ! Ha ! To be in the burning place at dead of night and to see corpses burning merrily ! I must go *(Struggles)*.

Meenakshi—(seizing him and aiding Kesav) You shall not go. You shall remain here, abandoning your devils *(the temple bells ring)*

Ah, the temple bells are ringing. God is willing to accept you again Come back, come back, from the devils and worship Him!

Raghuram—Set me free Let me go to the burning ground and watch the corpses burning merrily *(struggles fiercely and finally gets free and runs away shouting out 'Great is Kuttichathan, King of Devils')*.

Meenakshi—He is gone, gone back to the devils, just when God signified His willingness to take him back. Ah, me, what shall I do? *(weeps)*

Kesav—Don't weep He is just at present in the clutch of the devil It will take some time to reclaim him to God. But do not despair I shall go to-morrow in search of him and take him to a quiet nursing home. After a month or two, he will be quite all right How easy it is to get into the clutch of the devil and how difficult it is to get out of it! Now, let us all go in and have our meals

Meenakshi—Meals! Let those who want meals go and have them. For me, one thing alone matters, and that is that my husband is wandering about like a mad man, talking incessantly of devils It is my duty to follow him wherever he goes and bring him back to the path of virtue and godliness from which I made him deviate. *(runs after Raghuram)*

Kesav—(restraining her) What is the use of your running after him? It is pitch dark, being new moon. You will not be able to find him, and, even if you do, it will be of no avail He is too far gone now to listen to you. Come back into the house, come back!

Meenakshi—Never! What if it be pitch dark? This darkness is nothing like the darkness within me or like the darkness enveloping my beloved husband.

Kesav—Poor woman, senseless woman, what is the use of her rushing about like that?

Bhagirathi—Foolish as her action may seem, I admire her and respect her If you were in the same condition as Raghuram, I would have done just the same as Meenakshi.

Kesav—Would you?

Bhagirathi—What doubt is there?

Kesav—(embracing and kissing her) I am so glad. Thank God, I am not in the same condition as Raghuram. Now, I must go after Raghuram and Meenakshi It is not safe to allow poor Meenakshi to wander about alone in this pitch darkness

Bhagirathi—Nor is it human or brotherly. Here, take a lantern and some rope and go *(gives him a lantern and some rope)*

Kesav—(takes them) It may be very late before I return.

Bhagirathi—Never mind it My only anxiety is about poor Raghuram and Meenakshi *(Exit Kesav).*

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV, SCENE I

[*The same day 10 p m.*

A country track—Kesav and Meenakshi walking with the aid of a lantern in Kesav's hand.]

Kesav—It is nearly three hours since we began this fruitless search. The night is pitch dark, and the path horrible Dozens of thorns have entered my feet which have knocked against stones and are bleeding profusely. Had we not better return ?

Meenakshi—I feel no thorns or pebbles. I shall not return till I find him. You may go back if you like.

Kesav—What if you do not find him at all this night ?

Meenakshi—I shall spend the night in searching.

Kesav—What an idea ! (*yawns heavily*) My eye-lids are dr..ping in spite of me

Meenakshi—Mine are not My anxiety is too great for that

Kesav—Am I not also anxious about him ?

Meenakshi—Yes, but there is a difference.

Kesav—Look, look, somebody is running towards us in a panic

(*A man comes running at top speed*).

Hullo, what is the matter ?

Man—O God, save me, save me, from these devils! Am I escaping from Kuttichathan only to fall into the hands of these fire-devils? *(runs)*

Kesav—(rushes forward and catches him) We are not fire-devils, Don't be afraid. Tell us, what is it you saw?

Man—(trembling violently, still somewhat relieved) Oh, I saw the great devil Kuttichathan standing waist-deep in the river, four hundred yards from here, proclaiming its identity, and desiring to drink my blood. *(his teeth chatter violently with fear)* Leave me, whoever you are.

Kesav—Don't get frightened, man, what you saw was my brother-in-law.

Man—(with one supreme effort frees himself) It is even as I thought So, you are the fire-devil Kollikattai, the brother-in-law of Kuttichathan, King of Devils. Why did I stir out of my house on this dark night against my wife's advice? Oh, ye Gods in heaven, save me, save me! *(releases himself and runs away).*

Kesav—No wonder the man is so frightened! What else will a poor man do when he sees so many unnatural things at this unearthly hour? *(to Meenakshi)* Come, let us go to the river. We must not let him go this time

Meenakshi—Trust me for that I shall cling to him like a leech

Kesav—All right Don't make the slightest noise lest he should catch scent of us and run away. *(They go with noiseless steps, and see Raghuram in the middle of the river waist-deep in water, with his back towards them)*

Raghuram—(bawling out) I am Kuttichathan, King of Devils I want a goat, I want a cock, I want a sixth-month old foetus in the womb. Ha! Ha! Ha! Four rows of four each, sixteen in all, dripping with the blood of cocks, goats, buffaloes and Sundar! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Kesav—(whispers to Meenakshi) Keep absolutely quiet. Let us advance from behind noiselessly and catch hold of him with an iron grip *(both advance from behind, after subduing the light to almost extinction point and keeping it under a tree on the bank of the river, and, wading noiselessly through the water, spring on Raghuram and grip him fast).*

Meenakshi—(pinioning her husband with her determined arms) I have you now Not all the devils in hell can make you escape

Raghuram—(struggles fiercely, but all to no purpose) Who are you that dare to intrude on my privacy?

Meenakshi—Your wife, Meenakshi.

Raghuram—Let me go, you woman. I am wedded only to the devil.

Meenakshi—Then I am that devil.

Raghuram—No, Kuttichathan is the devil whom I have wedded.

Meenakshi—Let him settle his claims with me if he dares. His cloven feet will then get also a cloven head to carry

Raghuram—(addressing Kesav) And who are you?

Kesav—Your brother-in-law.

Raghuram—I have no brother-in-law.

Kesav—But I have. Drag him along, Meenakshi. Don't allow him to escape *(Both drag him to the bank).*

Raghuram—(struggling fiercely) My meditations are broken.

Kesav—Yes, the reality is about to begin. We have had enough and more of these meditations. Drag him along to that tree. *(Both drag him to the tree on the bank).*

Kesav—(to Meenakshi) Hold him fast while I tie him with the rope I have brought with me *(Meenakshi holds Raghuram with an iron grip while Kesav ties both his hands together behind his back with a rope and ties the end of another rope to the right leg of Raghuram, tying the other end to his own right fore-arm)* Now, bring the lantern, quick and let us go.

Raghuram—(bawls out) I shall drink your blood, you villains!

Meenakshi—(bringing the lantern) Do it if you can If we are villains, who are the good people?

Kesav—Now, let us go! *(drags him along, Meenakshi showing the light).*

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV, SCENE 2

[*The next day, 6 a. m.*

Pallanchathanur—The street Kesav and Veeraraghava walking engaged in conversation].

Veeraraghava— This is the first time that I am asked to treat a *man* possessed by the devils. Hitherto, all my patients were women.

Kesav—What of that? Are you diffident of curing him?

Veeraraghava—Oh, no, the devils can be driven away by me, whether they possess men or women. Only, I am somewhat handicapped by lack of past experience of men. But, never fear, whatever the handicap in favour of the devils, Veeraarghava is sure to win. His name is a guarantee for that.

Kesav—I am glad to hear that

Veeraraghava—Can you tell me what devils possess him?

Kesav—That you ought to be able to say. How can I say? What do I know about devils?

Veeraraghava—I shall tell you Devils are classified into four different ways by those who know The first is according to the element they inhabit. Hence, we get here five different kinds of devils, earth-devils, water-devils fire-devils, air-devils and ether-devils, The second classification is according to their inherent '*gunas*' or qualities. Here we get three different kinds of devils, offensive devils or devils who boldly and wantonly take the offensive in wars, defensive devils or devils who never take the offensive but are most resolute in their defence when attacked, and cowardly devils who neither attack nor defend themselves but take to their cloven feet on the

least mention of war The third classification is according to their acquired '*gunas*' or qualities. Here we get four different kinds of devils, divine-devils or devils with whom gods have fought; semi-divine-devils or devils with whom heroer have fought; diabolical-devils or devils with whom other devils have fought, and mere devils or devils with whom neither gods nor heroes nor devils have fought: Some experts have a fourth classification of devils, namely seen devils, unseen but known devils, and unseen and unknown devils.

Kesav—How can there be unseen and unknown devils?

Veeraraghava—Are not astronomers agreed that there must be many stars that we neither see nor know to exist?

Kesav—That is so.

Veeraraghava—We necromancers never take anything for granted till we have fully argued it out. Now, tell me what devils possess Raghuram?

Kesav—Kuttichathan, Chankilikaruppan, Madan and Katteri, according to what I can make out.

Veeraraghava—(gasping) God of our fathers, so many devils all together in one man? And what devils! All the four are offensive devils, all are diabolicaldevils, and all are seen devils. Moreover, Kuttichathan is an ether-devil, Chankilikaruppan is an air-devil, Madan is an earth-devil, and Katteri is a water-devil. Besides, the famous fire-devil Kollikkattai is the brother-in-law of

Kuttichathan and is sure to help him Why, this is the most desperate case I have ever undertaken !

Kesav—Are you diffident of success ?

Veeraraghava—No, but then I am only one man against so many powerful devils Pray, tell me, is Raghuram also physically strong ?

Kesav—Why, I should say so Myself and Meenakshi together found it most difficult to secure him and bring him.

Veeraraghava—Hm ! I say, you would perhaps have done better to have gone to Trikanancode or Ettumanur.

Kesav—Why ?

Veeraraghava—These devils will never have a chance against the gods there.

Kesav—Will they prove too much for you ?

Veeraraghava—(to himself) Curse the fellow ! Why can't he let me alone ? For the sake of the miserable ten rupees I get to-day, I may lose my reputation It is one thing to deal with hysterical women, it is quite another to have to do with an aggressive male.

Kesav—What are you thinking about ?

Veeraraghava—About the remedies I should adopt. Never fear ! I shall triumph over the devils.

Kesav—I hope you will. Now, we are near my house. There is my wife standing at the door waiting for us. *(to Bhagirathi)* How is Raghuram ?

Bhàgirathi—In a most aggressive mood. Poor Meenakshi is quite exhausted in the effort to keep him under control It is a good thing the necromancer has come.

Veeraraghava—(aside) Good for you, but is it good, or even safe, for me? *(aloud)* Never fear, Bhagirathi, all devils are afraid of Veeraraghava.

Bhagirathi—I know that; that is why I asked my husband to get you at once. It is a hard case even for you.

Veeraraghava—Hm!

Bhagirathi—There, he is bawling out again Please enter *(All three enter the house and go to where Raghuram and Meenakshi are)*

Kesav—(to Meenakshi) The necromancer has come!

Raghuram—Who is this necromancer? Ha! Ha! Ha Old Veeraraghava, is it? Let me drink his blood. This is not the first time I drink a necromancer's blood. Ha! Ha! Ha!

Veeraraghava—(aside) This is an impossible case. Still, I must act my part. *(aloud)* Keep quiet, you devils, lest I should beat you with my cane, Bhagirathi, bring some ashes so that I may incantate them and throw them on him. *(Squats down cross-legged in front of Raghuram at a safe distance, Raghuram is held down on either side by Meenakshi and Kesav, Bhagirathi brings some ashes and gives them to Veeraraghava).*

Veeraraghava—(taking the ashes and muttering some inaudible incantations) May all the four devils leave you ! Sh ! Sh ! Sh ! *(Throws the incantated ashes at Raghuram)*

Raghuram—Pooh ! *(Spits on the face of Veeraraghava)*

Veeraraghava—(wiping off the spittle aside) I am disgraced Still, this is no time for cowardice *(aloud)* Ah, you audacious devils, you deserve to be thrashed into respect *(takes his cane and gives one smart cut on Raghuram's right shoulder)*

Raghuram—(shakes himself free from Kesav and Meenakshi who had been bewildered by the whole proceeding and had somewhat slackened their hold, wrenches the stick from the hands of Veeraraghava, who had no time or presence of mind to escape, trips him down and gives him a regular shower of blows on all parts of his body). I shall presently drink your blood. I am Kuttichathan, I am Chankilikaruppan, I am Madan, I am Katteri !

Veeraraghava—(cries out piteously for help) Oh, save me from this villain ! All my ribs are aching, and still the cane is descending Kesav, Meenakshi, Bhagirathi, save me ! Save me ! Why did I fall into this snare open-eyed ? *(Kesav, Meenakshi and Bhagirathi laugh in spite of themselves and at last tie up Raghuram securely in a corner of the room).*

Kesav—Veeraraghava, I have seen necromancers beating devils many times This is the only time when I have seen the devils beat the necromancer *(laughs, Meenakshi and Bhagirathi also laugh)*

Veeraraghava—(rises up dazed) You heartless wretches, you are laughing at my misery, is it ?

Kesav—No, no, Veeraraghava, still, the thing was so comic.

Raghuram—Release me, let me drink his blood!

Veeraraghava—(to himself) Ah, now he is securely tied. I can cane him without any risk. *(picks up his cane and advances towards Raghuram)*

Meenakshi—Never shall my husband be beaten again!

Veeraraghava—Why, he beat me so severely!

Meenakshi—Is it as an act of revenge that you want to beat him again?

Veeraraghava—No, but the devils should not be allowed to triumph over necromancers *(advances again)*

Meenakshi—If you proceed to beat him, I shall cut the cords which bind him, and leave you in the room alone with him.

Veeraraghava—You demoness! *(withdraws)* I shall file a complaint against Kesav and Raghuram.

Kesav—For what offences?

Veeraraghava—Against Raghuram for beating me, and against you for abetting the beating

Kesav—How did I abet?

Veeraraghava—By bringing me here, and laughing at my beating.

Kesav—All right, file a complaint. Let us see what you get.

Veeraraghava—Give me my promised fees.

Kesav—What fees? What have you done except beating him and being beaten by him? Go, file a civil suit also for the fees, and pursue both civil and criminal remedies.

Veeraraghava—I said all that in joke. Pay me my fees.

Kesav—Never

Veeraraghava—Then I shall file a complaint and suit

Kesav—Do.

Veeraraghava—Never was I beaten and cheated so shamelessly! But you shall all suffer for this. I shall make the devils strengthen their hold on him

Kesav—Then you will get beaten more often, that is all. Now, get out (*pushes out Veeraraghava and bolts the door from within*)

Veeraraghava—A curse on you, you scoundrels! May you all go to the lowest depths of hell! (*To himself*). But what is the use of my bawling out like this? I shall only make an ass of myself. Let me go home, rub my whole body and take a soothing oil bath. Never again will I consent to treat males, never!

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV SCENE 3.

[*Ten days later, Time 6 p. m.*

Ettumanur temple[1] *Ram and Narayana standing in the portico*].

Ram—How many pilgrims are coming to this temple every day!

Narayana—Most of these come for getting some of their females rid of the devils which possess them How few go back satisfied!

Ram—Not so few as you think. Hundreds are cured every year

Narayana—I doubt it.

Ram—You doubt everything. Your whole solution to the world's evils is an eternal doubt.

Narayana—Such a doubt is necessary for any solution of the world's evils.

Ram—But, look here, Narayana, do you mean to say that nobody is cured here? If so, why should thousands come year after year?

Narayana—Some are cured owing to their faith that they will be cured, and some by the change of place and environment.

Ram—I say, here is Raghuram being brought by Kesav and Meenakshi (*enter Kesav, Meenakshi and Raghuram*).

1 A famous temple on the west coast resorted to for exorcising devils

Narayana—Hullo, Raghuram, are you not cured yet?

Raghuram—Long live Kuttichathan !

Ram—Kesav, you could have taken him first to Trikkanankode [1].

Kesav—I did so. But when one of the adepts there offered him the incantated and medicated milk in a small cup, Raghuram snatched the whole pot from him, drank all the milk at a draught, and cried out 'I am Kuttichathan !' All the assembled adepts were frightened, and advised us to come here That day, dozens had to go without incantated milk

Narayana—Kesav, do you really believe that Raghuram will be cured here ?

Meenakshi—Of course, he will be cured. Narayana, you are the only man who gave good advice to my husband then, advice which he rejected. Please help him now to recover his senses Let us all go in and interview the priest in charge of devil-possessed people. (*Enter Brahmadattan Nambudiri*)

Ram—There he comes Here is a new patient, Brahmadattan

Brahmadattan—(to Kesav, Meenakshi and Raghuram) Where ?

Narayana—Can't you make out even that ? And you are the man who is going to cure the patient !

1 A small temple in Malabar largely resorted to for casting off devils, vomitting poisons etc

Brahmadattan—Don't jeer, It is not I who cure the patients, but God. I am only his humble agent.

Narayana—Too humble, methinks, to be of any use.

Brahmadattan—Well, don't think I don't know. This is the patient, (*points to Meenakshi*)

Narayana—Ha! Ha! Ha! If your cure is of the same order as your guesses, these poor people need not have come all this long way.

Brahmadattan—I see only one woman here. Who else is possessed by the devil then? Is she outside?

Narayana—It is not a *she*, it is a *he*, and that *he* is here. (*points to Raghuram*)

Raghuram—I am Kuttichathan! I shall soon drink all the blood in this fat man's body (*advances towards Brahmadattan who rushes into a neighbouring room and closes the door yelling out 'Help' 'Help'*)

Narayana—(laughing) Why don't you cure this patient?

Brahmadattan—(from within) I cure only women. Take him away, or I shall send for the police.

Narayana—What right have you to send people away from the temple? All of us, including him, will remain here. Do what you like.

Brahmadattan—I shall then bolt the door from inside, and remain thus till the police come on their usual beat at 7 p m. I shall never come out, with this dangerous fellow at large. He is not possessed by the devils,

that is a lie No *man* is ever possessed by the devils, at least not within my experience which extends over the last 17½ years.

Narayana—(to Kesav, Meenakshi, Raghuram and Ram) No use waiting here Let us go into the temple.

(All five go in).

Kesav—Who are those three women in that *Mantapam* ? [1]

Ram—They are possessed by devils

Kesav—Let us go near them and see whether they are cured *(all go near the women)*

Ist Woman—I tried to eat my child, but it was too cunning It slipped between my teeth The necromancer beat me mercilessly

Raghuram—I beat the necromancer mercilessly, and would have drunk his blood but for a woman who called herself my wife, and a man who said he was my brother-in-law, though I have neither wife nor brother-in-law

2nd Woman—They say I am possessed by the devil, but really it is I who possess the devil. Where is the devil if it is not within me ?

3rd Woman—I have three devils within me.

Raghuram—I have four devils within me.

3rd Woman—(shrieks) I shall dance this way and that. *(dances—the other two women also tremble violently and begin a sympathetic dance, a crowd gathers)*

1 A stone structure with a single hall supported by pillars

Narayana—Let us go away from here. It is none too pleasant a sight to watch Hullo, here comes our friend Brahmadattan with a policeman.

(Enter Brahmadattan and a policeman)

Policeman—(to Brahmadattan) Who is the rowdy who wanted to drink your blood?

Brahmadattan—(pointing to Raghuram) There he is.

Policeman—(to Raghuram) Did you say that you wanted to drink his blood?

Raghuram—Yes, I did. I still want to do so.

Policeman—Why?

Raghuram—Because he is so fat *(all laugh)*

Policeman—Who are you?

Raghuram—I am Kuttichathan.

Policeman—You are the most self-assertive devil I ever saw. *(turning to Narayana)* Is the man possssed?

Ram—Of course, he is He has come to be cured here, but Brahmadattan Nambudiri will not treat him from fear.

Brahmadattan—(to Policeman) Are my fears entirely groundless?

Policeman—No, your bulk is really tempting to any enterprising devil How many temple offerings have been concentrated in your body!

Ram—Policeman, please ask Brahmadattan to give Raghuram the usual sacred water and flowers

Brahmadattan—I shall give them provided all of you promise to see to my safety

Policeman—We shall see to that. Now bring the sacred water and flowers.

(Bhahmadattan brings them and gives some to each and at last gives to Raghuram with a trembling hand).

Raghuram—Why do you give me water when I want blood ? Come, let me drink your blood !

Brahmadattan—Avaunt ! You devil !

Raghuram—This priest I shall suck dry and leave nothing but oil-skin and bones behind ! *(rushes at him Brahmadattan takes refuge in the innermost sanctuary bolting the door)* I killed Gopal's child, and have danced many times in the burning place with garlands of children's bones round my neck.

Brahmadattan—(from within) Constable, turn him out. I shall never forget this service

Policeman—I shall turn him out *(advances towards Raghuram who runs away at top speed through the portico and escapes)*

Meenakshi—He is gone ! How are we to catch him ?

Narayana—Come, let us all go in search of him. It is dangerous to allow him to go alone into the town

Policeman—Quite so.

(Exeunt Ram, Narayana, Meenakshi, Kesav and the Policeman)

Brahmadattan (opens the door and comes out cautiously To himself) The stars have shone on me

auspiciously today Let me at once shut the door adjoining the portico lest the fellow should come again I really believe that he is four devils in one, his wicked ideas are so appalling Fancy his desire to suck me dry!

(Exit)

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV, SCENE 4

[*That same evening*

Ettumanur—Appu Ayyar's hotel—Time 7-30 p m. Ten people taking their meals]

Ist Boarder—The meals are fine to day Appu Ayyar is evidently in a good mood.

Appu Ayyar—Wait till you finish. There is a rare dish waiting for you

2nd Boarder—Payasam? (1)

Appu Ayyar—Of course.

All the Boarders together—Hurrah! What is the matter today, Appu Ayyar?

Appu Ayyar—Nothing special Why, have I not given you *payasam* before?

1st Boarder—Yes, of course, but there was always some special reason.

Appu Ayyar—A good hotel-keeper needs no special reasons to give his boarders a nice feast occasionally.

1 A delicious sweet porridge, made of milk, rice and sugar

1st Boarder—That is true, but still there must be something at the bottom of all this. Tell us, Appu Ayyar, so that we may also join in the rejoicing.

Appu Ayyar—Well, since you insist, I shall tell you. I have got three thousand rupees in a crossword puzzle.

All—Congratulations, Appu Ayyar. We knew that you would have some special reason.

Appu Ayyar—Now, do justice to the *payasam.* (*pours it on all the plantain leaves*) Who is rushing in like this into the hotel? (*enter Raghuram with wild rolling eyes, and dishevelled hair*)

Raghuram—I am Kuttichathan, King of Devils. I want to drink human blood Ah, yours will do (*rushes at Appu Ayyar with open mouth Appu Ayyar runs out leaving his cash-box behind All the boarders leave their payasam and frantically rush to the door yelling out "The devil! The devil The devil", Raghuram pursues them shouting out "I want blood yours will do, yours will do" Wild confusion and cries in the street which is covered with darkness The lamp in the hotel is blown out by the wind, A thief takes advantage of the confusion and enters the hotel*).

Thief—(to himself) What a magnificent opportunity to ply my trade! A pity I did not bring some matches! But, then, who could have guessed that this hotel would be accessible so easily at this hour? Appu Ayyar is a miser, he must have stored a good lot of money somewhere Let me enter and search It is awfully dark inside (*enters*) Good Heavens, whatever is here! (*steps on the payasam on one leaf slips and falls down at full length, Re-enter Appu Ayyar with a policeman and a light*).

Appu Ayyar—Thank God, my cash-box is safe. What is there lying down? Is it another devil? *(trembles)*

Policeman—It looks like it, but I should think that this devil is a thief. Hullo, man, get up. *(Raises the thief up).*

Thief—I did not come to steal. I merely came to see what the matter was

Policeman—Why should you then have entered the house? Moreover, if I remember aright, you were convicted last year.

Thief—Master, leave me this time. I shall never again give room for complaint.

Appu Ayyar—Rascal, you came to steal my cash-box did you? *(gives him a fist cuff on his ribs)* It is a good thing I gave *payasam* to my boarders to-day. Else, I should have lost my cash-box which contains five hundred and sixty-two rupees, seven annas and two pies.

Thief—Oh, so much as that!

Appu Ayyar—A good thing you didn't know that. Constable, leave that fellow with a kick, for it will be difficult to prove his intention, you know. Magistrates are so queer now-a-days.

Policeman—Don't blame them It is the law which is responsible for it all If we were allowed to get confessions as we like, every case will be proved.

Appu Ayyar—Well, well, there are two opinions regarding that Now, send away the thief.

Policeman—Get away, you clumsy fellow, you are not clever enough to be even a successful thief ! (*kicks the thief who bows to him and runs away laughing*). I say, Appu Ayyar, you have prepared some *payasam* to-day !

Appu Ayyar—Yes, sit down and have some.

Policeman—I would much rather take it to my house and eat it at leisure.

Appu Ayyar—I know what you mean. Eat some here, and take some for your wife and children

Policeman—I will, thank you It is amazing how cowardly all of you became at the sight of one poor fellow possessed by the devil

Appu Ayyar—The fact is, we did not know whether it was a man possessed by the devil or the devil himself. It was dark, and, in the dim light, we could make out only a bloated face, dishevelled hair and a terrific voice. Besides, even when the whole thing was known, you were yourself afraid to catch hold of him. But for Narayana and Ram we should never have secured the fellow at all.

Policeman—But, then, those two fellows were from his village and knew what he would do and what he would not do They knew, in short, the history of the case, so, they were naturally bold.

Appu Ayyar—Well, I won't tease you any longer. Come to the back verandah and have some *payasam*

Policeman—What a lot of *payasam* these fellows have wasted!

Appu Ayyar—They didn't waste, poor fellows, they were scared away just when they began to eat it.

Policeman—Now, having risen from their leaves, they can't eat it, I suppose?

Appu Ayyar—No!

Policeman—What will they, do poor fellows?

Appu Ayyar—Go without it. Now, come. (*Both go inside*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT V, SCENE I

[*A month later,*

Thenur—Gopal's house—Time—8 p.m. Gopal and Janaki sitting inside the house, alone]

Gopal—It is brilliant moon-light outside Let us sit in the court-yard enjoying the beauties of nature, watching the moon and the stars

Janaki—The moon and the stars have lost their charms for me If you want, you can go and sit out. Shall I spread the carpet for you?

Gopal—No, not unless you too come.

Janaki—I will not come.

Gopal—Why are you so moody?

Janaki—You know the cause.

Gopal—What is the use of brooding over past calamities?

Janaki—But, just think of our Sundar, so young, so active, so active, so affectionate, but dead, dead, dead.

Gopal—*(with tears flowing down his cheeks)* Janaki *(sinks down)*

Janaki—*(weeping and clasping her husband in a close embrace)* Come, let us weep over our dead child! Never since his death have we done like this once. My heart has been craving for it and aching for our tears to fall on one another and mingle. *(Both hug each other and weep for some time bitterly)*

Gopal—Why did you not tell me about this your yearning, Janaki?

Janaki—There are some things which cannot be told but which must be guessed.

Gopal—You have been doing nothing but brooding all these long days since our darling's death.

Janaki—It has permanently clouded my horizon

Gopal—But remember the other children and me.

Janaki—It is because I remember you and them that I am still alive.

Gopal—Leave off these morbid thoughts They will lead to madness.

Janaki—Often, I have thought that I was on the very brink of madness

Gopal—Drop such thoughts (*kisses her*) Now, come out with me and enjoy the moon-light a bit (*gently pulls her along*)

Janaki—I shall obey whatever you say, for you and the children are all that is left to me.

Gopal—I hear that Meenakshi now heartily repents for all that she did to us

Janaki—What is the good of that? She cannot restore Sundar to life

Gopal—It seems Raghuram is raving mad, and is given up as hopeless even by the people at Trikkanankode and Ettumanur

Janaki—I am sorry for Meenakshi

Gopal—Yes, but in a way she deserves it.

Janaki—Don't say that. The heart of woman is ever troubled In their grief, women will make many cruel allegations.

Gopal—She wants to see you in person and beg your forgiveness

Janaki—I have forgiven her already, but I do not want to see her. Memories of Sundar will rush upon me and kill me if I see her face to face

Gopal—Well, now, let us go and sit outside.

(CURTAIN)

ACT V, SCENE 2

[*A week later*

Pallanchathanur—Kesav's house—Time—9 p. m. Kesav, Narayana, Meenakshi and Bhagirathi engaged in a conference],

Narayana—I tell all of you most emphatically that there is no devil at all, that the devil is but a figment of the imagination invented for their own profit by necromancers and devil-dancers.

Meenakshi—Then, God too is but a figment of the imagination invented for their own profit by priests and clergymen

Narayana—No, not quite, though, of course, priests and clergymen have shaped God to suit their own interests. How can we explain the universe without a Creator?

Meenakshi—How can we explain the crimes and sins of this world without postulating the existence of a devil or devils? Now, surely, how can you explain my husband's condition if there were no devils at all?

Narayana—He has evidently deluded himself into the belief that there are devils, and even that he is one or four of them

Meenakshi—We took him from necromancer to necromancer, from temple to temple, spent enormous sums on him, and got no less than 2 lbs weight of amulets strung on his loins, but with absolutely no effect.

The amulets given by the gods seem to be powerless against the devils which possess him.

Narayana—It is not gods who gave them, but priests.

Meenakshi—It comes to the same thing.

Kesav—Let us come to something more practical than this barren discussion. How are we to bring Raghuram back to his senses? I am tired of all these wanderings, and am sick of the man and his ways. He never seems to remember who he is, or what is expected of him I can't be eternally wandering after him, as I have been doing for the last few months. Even as it is, my business is at a standstill. I am sorry for Meenakshi, but, then, what can I do?

Meenakshi—I don't blame you, brother You have done all that a brother should do, and more

Kesav—I wish something had come out of it all.

Bhagirathi—Well, has Narayana got anything to suggest?

Narayana—I would ask you to give him rest, and not to excite him by taking him from temple to temple, necromancer to necromancer By seeing necromancers and other possessed people, he will only get excited. Give him complete rest, bathe him every morning in cold water, and recite songs in his presence That is all the advice I can give you Now, I must be going

Kesav—Take a lantern

Narayana—There is brilliant moon-light outside. Where is the need for a lantern? Well, I shall see you all again some time

(Exit Narayana).

Kesav—I think Narayana's remedy for Raghuram's ailment is worth a serious trial.

Bhagirathi—Besides, that is the only remedy which can be tried without unnecessary trouble and expense. What do you say, Meenakshi?

Meenakshi—I am weary of life

Bhagirathi—Why do you say that? Have we not done all that we possibly could?

Meenakshi—You have I never said that you hadn't. But, still, my husband's state is such that I feel little interest in life The painful thought that I am the cause of the whole evil oppresses me Till he is his former self again, I shall never be happy

Kesav—Let us all sit outside It is beautiful moonlight. We shall begin to try Narayana's remedy. Bring Raghuram also outside (*All go outside with Raghuram Raghuram runs away shouting 'I am Kuttichathan, 'I want blood to drink*)

Kesav—Damn the fellow! He is gone again on his wanderings The foolish theory of Narayana is the cause of this

Bhagirathi—Don't blame Narayana It is a fact that Raghuram was not benefited in the least by his detention. By his being left to his own ways, perhaps. the madness may wear off in course of time

Kesav—That is a big perhaps

Bhagirathi—Well, what else can be done?

Kesav—Nothing I am sorry for Meenakshi.

Meenakshi—Don't be sorry for me I was the cause of his madness.

Bhagirathi—Why do you call it madness? Is it not possession by the devils?

Meenakshi—I have been deeply thinking over what Narayana said and have come to the conclusion that after all, he is right, and that my husband's whole trouble is the result of his excited imagination, and is thus akin to madness

Kesavi—Bravo, Meenakshi! You have now come to the second stage of progress But, what do you intend to do now?

Meenakshi—I shall go in search of him

Kesavi—I can't come with you I am tired of all these searches

Meenakshi—You need not come The night is quite bright to day

Kesavi—Still, for a woman like you to venture out alone is neither safe nor advisable nor even respectable

Meenakshi—There is nothing more respectable for a wife than to search for her husband As regards the safety and advisability of venturing out, I set no store at all by my life As for my honour, I can always protect it against all attacks

Kesavi—But where will be the end of all these searches?

Meenakshi—This is to be the very last search.

Kesav—Till the next

Meenakshi—No, I promise you that this shall be the very last search I have found out the mistake in our old procedure We ought never to have forcibly brought him home Persuasion alone is to be used this time.

Kesav—As if persuasion will be of any avail with him!

Meenakshi—Well, if it is of no use, there is an end of the matter, I shall come back and never more worry about him. I shall regard myself like a widow or a discarded wife. If I succeed in persuading him, I have hopes of curing him.

Bhagirathi—There is sense in what she says

Kesav—Do you seriously believe that he will be persuaded into coming back?

Bhagirathi—Perhaps, he may Anyhow, it is worth a trial

Kesav—You are as mad as he is

Bhagirathi—It may not pay to be over-cautious at all times

Meenakshi—I am going

Kesav—Wait a minute I too am coming since you say that this is the very last search It shall never be said of me that I did not help my sister in her last search Bhagirathi, shut the door and remain inside till we come.

Bhagirathi—When will you come back?

Kesav—How can we say? It may be that we return in an hour, or after twelve hours.

Bhagirathi—Here, take a lantern (*gives one*) You are sure you don't want any rope?

Meenakshi—Absolutely.

Kesav—Then off we go (*takes the latern—exeunt Kesav and Meenakshi*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT V, SCENE 3.

[*The same night*

A burning place—Time—1 a m A corpse burning—Raghuram dancing round it—Meenakshi and Kesav concealed in a neighbouring bush]

Raghuram—(dances—to himself) I 'am the devil. I caused you to die I delight in seeing human bodies burn as they do in hell There the heat is terrific and it is uncomfortable to watch. How consoling it is to warm oneself by a corpse's burning! The owner of the body, had he been alive, would never have permitted it That is why it is so enjoyable. Ha! Ha! Ha! the head is bursting. Poor man, in all your life your head never burst with ideas, now, it is bursting with fire. Your name I know not, but you are a truly charitable person. The left hand should not know what the right hand giveth. Here, the man does not know what his body giveth. I am for the devils Once I had a wife called Meenakshi. She was also a devotee of the devils. Four rows of four

devils each, graded according to rank, facing one another. Oh, the devils are the most sociable of all beings, but very particular about their rank, very aristocratic. Each devil has to be of a certain height, and not a millimeter more Besides, nothing will be done by any devil without payment. This is also aristocratic But the devils are democratic too They don't wait, like God, for people to go to them They go out to meet all people who show the least inclination to meet them. They are also, like demagogues, fond of followers, whatever their character, and are not, like God, insisting on impossible qualifications and a select company The common adherents of God and the devils form the majority of mankind. Hence the perpetual war between the gods and the devils In this war I am on the side of the devils, but not so my wife Meenakshi. She has deserted the devils. I am for the devils I am the devils. Ho! Ho! Ho! *(dances)*

Meenakshi—(to Kesav in a whisper) Keep absolutely quiet I shall go out and tackle him Never stir till you are called.

Kesav—(in a whisper) All right But it seems to me it is dangerous to meet him now.

Meenakshi—(in a whisper) Well, I am prepared for all emergencies *(emerges out of the bush and comes into the open)*

Raghuram—(seeing her) Who comes here at this dread hour? Is it that hated goddess Bhadrakali?* She

* The dread consort of Siva and a frequenter of burning places, and the inveterate enemy of all devils

is ever the enemy of devils I shall fight her (*advances towards Meenakshi*)

Meenakshi—My husband!

Raghuram—I shall drink your blood, O Bhadrakali!

Meenakshi—(advancing towards him) Drink! (*Raghuram bites Meenakshi on the left shoulder and sucks some blood*).

Raghuram—Oh! Oh! How hot blood is! What am I doing? (*falls down unconscious*)

Meenakshi—Kesav, come here (*Kesav comes*)

Kesav—What shall we do now?

Meenakshi—As soon as he recovers consciousness, let us take him home and give him complete rest His delirium is past its acme

Kesav—What about your wound? Why didn't you cry out while he was sucking your blood?

Meenakshi—Oh, I deserve it. I was the cause. I wish he had drunk my last drop of blood and recovered his former frame of mind. Go, bring some water from the river.

Kesav—In what?

Meenakshi—In this cocoanut shell (*picks up one from the ground and gives it to Kesav*) This shell was probably brought here to make the corpse burn better, and we are using it for this purpose! Now go.

(*Kesav goes*).

Meenakshi—(to herself) There he lies, tame like a sleeping babe, he who was wandering about, ever restless Nature has worked her cure His repeated thirst for blood stopped the moment his lips touched blood I felt exalted when he was drinking my blood. I felt as I did when I was giving suck to my babes in happy days gone by! Mysterious are the freaks of fate! Under the shadow of a burning corpse, at this unnatural hour, has begun the revolution in my husband Let me kiss those eyes into consciousness (*kisses*) I must kiss his lips also. It is a long time since I did so (*kisses several times*). There is no response in his lips now, but still, it is sweet. Let me call him by his name, now when he cannot hear me, Raghuram, Raghuram, beloved Raghuram (*calls, kissing him with each call*) Ah, he is opening his eyes! (*rises up confused*)

Raghuram—Where am I? (*rubs his eyes*) Ah, Meenakshi, is it not you?

Meenakshi—Dearest, it is myself. Who else?

Raghuram—Why is this corpse burning here?

Meenakshi—Because its owner died, I suppose

Raghuram—Whose is it?

Meenakshi—I don't know

Raghuram—Fancy your attending a cremation without knowing whose body is being cremated! And why were you kissing me and calling me 'Raghuram,' 'Raghuram'?

Meenakshi—(confused) You were unconscious. It is a long time since I kissed you.

Raghuram—I had a horrible dream. I dreamt that I was possessed by the devils and drank your blood. Did I really drink your blood?

Meenakshi—No, of course, not.

Raghuram—Yes, I did Show me your left shoulder. *(looks at her left shoulder)* There it is! Ah, what a horrible brute I am! What can I do now?

Meenakshi—Kiss that wound, dearest, and it will be cured

Raghuram—What a pleasant and easy cure *(kisses the wound several times)*. I wish cures were as easy and pleasant. Hullo, who is this coming to this place at this unnatural hour?

Meenakshi—It is Kesav, your brother-in-law.

Raghuram—Oh, Kesav, is it? The husband of Bhagirathi?

Kesav—The same

Meenakshi—Why are you so late, brother?

Kesav—Oh, I came long ago, but, seeing Raghuram open his eyes, waited till he had fully recovered consciousness.

Meenakshi—(blushes deeply) Why did you do so? *(aside)* He is sure to tell Bhagirathi, and, good woman as she is, she will never forego the woman's privilege of laughter. A faithfully coloured account will be rife in

the village, to-morrow But, after all, what do I care if my husband is all right again ?

Kesav—Don't be anxious Meenakshi, I shall not tell Bhagirathi

Meenakshi—(blushes) Come, give me the water *(takes it and washes the face of Raghuram)*

Raghuram—Did I drink much blood ?

Meenakshi—Only a drop or two Don't worry about it.

Raghuram—I drank your blood at the devil's bidding. I drank my dear wife's dear blood at the bidding of those monsters of iniquity. I never want to have anything to do with those devils again. I abjure them, I abjure them all.

Meenakshi—(hugging him with tears in her eyes) I am so glad to hear this.

Kesav—Come, let us go now. Bhagirathi will be ever so glad to learn about all this. After all, Narayana's remedy was the best.

(CURTAIN)

ACT V, SCENE 4

[*A month later.*

Perinkulam—Time 8 a.m. Street in front of Raghuram's house—Enter Meenakshi, Kesav and Bhagirathi].

Meenakshi—Thank God, the mortgage is redeemed. Brother, your generosity is boundless.

Kesav—It would have had to be still more boundless were it not for Iswar's mortal fear of the devils. It was a good thing that Narayana asked us not to clear the house of the devils till the house was redeemed. As it was, Iswar was glad to take Rs 75, in full satisfaction of his whole claims.

Bhagirathi—But the others would not take anything less than Rs 100 each, why was that?

Kesav—Because there were no devils in the vessels or the jewel whereas there were sixteen devils in the house in addition to its being polluted with the blood of animals We must thank our stars that we recovered the vessels and the jewel, for the usurers never intended to return them at all. But for Narayana's threat to give evidence against them, they would in all probability, never have surrendered them.

Meenakshi—Narayana is a good man. His advice to destroy every vestige of the devils in the house before my husband is brought here is excellent. We shall open the door and throw all the devils out and tread on them. Why are all these villagers assembling?

Kesav—Perhaps, they want to see what the fun is. Let them see the casting out, as they saw the installation, of these devils *(Enter Krishna, Ram, Muthu, Rukmini etc, and a crowd of urchins)*

Krishna—What are you going to do?

Meenakshi—We are going to throw the devils out and tread on them

Krishna—Oh, don't do that You may bring still more evil on yourself and on the village.

Meenakshi—You objected to the installation of the devils. Why do you also object to their casting out?

Krishna—Having been installed, they cannot be cast out in this unceremonious fashion The best thing would be to take off the roof and allow the sun, wind and rain to do the work Here comes Narayana, let us ask him. *(Enter Narayana and Trivikrama)*

Meenakshi—I don't want to ask anybody Here they go! *(opens the door, takes out two images of Kuttichathan and Chankilikaruppan and hurls them into the street where they break into a hundred pieces)*

Krishna—Meenakshi, why not do it at least in the night?

Meenakshi—(treading on the broken bits) Do whatever you can, you wretched devils. Let me at least have the consolation of having trodden on you! *(tread venomously)*.

Trivikrama—May I also cast out some images and tread on them, Meenakshi?

Meenakshi—Yes, if you like *(Trivikrama and other school-boys enter the house, bring out all the images, throw them into the street, and tread on them)*.

Krishna—These are only four devils trodden on, three are sixty-six crores of them And new devils, scientific devils, like atom bomb, are coming!

Meenakshi—If every Indian treads on four devils per day these sixty-six crores can be trodden on in less than half a day.

Krishna—If all of them are thus trodden on and crushed, what will become of Veeraraghava?

Narayana—He will cry with Othello, "My occupation's gone!" (*all laugh*) But, unlike Othello, he will soon take to another occupation (*laughter again*). Hullo, whatever is this, it is raining hard! Pouring, in fact! (*rains hard*). It is God's rain to wash off the devil's ragments. Hara Hara Mahadeva![1] He will find us a way to deal with the new devils.

All—Hara Hara Mahadeva! Govinda! Govinda![2].

(CURTAIN)

THE END.

1 A cry of praise uttered by devotees of Siva

2 A cry of praise to Vishnu

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Printed at the "Vavilla Press," Madras —1952.